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THE THEOLOGY OF CHARLES WILLIAMS

A Descriptive,
Interpretive and Critical
Essay

A thesis submitted to
the Dean and Faculty of
The Episcopal Theological School
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Divinity

by

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Williams

Charles Walter Stansby Williams was born in London in 1886. His father's sensibilities were more literary than commercial; he excelled, however, neither in writing nor business. It was left to Mrs. Williams, more often than not, to keep the family from poverty. When Charles was eight the family moved to St. Alban's because of Mr. Williams's health and eyesight. Charles attended St. Alban's Abbey School in 1894 and St. Alban's Grammar School in 1898, to which he won a county scholarship. Another scholarship allowed him to attend University College, London in 1903, but he dropped out before the academic year ended for financial reasons. He worked in a Methodist publishing house for four years, and in 1908 as a temporary proof-reader he joined the staff of the Oxford University Press, "a publishing house of modern outlook and ancient standards."¹

1. A. M. Hadfield, An Introduction to Charles Williams, Robert Hale Ltd., 1959, p. 67.

What began as a temporary job lasted a lifetime; Williams was with the Oxford University Press until his death in 1945. In 1917 he married an ironmonger's daughter, Florence Conway, whom he renamed Michal. The marriage was highly successful as his dedication to an essay indicates. It reads, "To Michal, by whom I began to study the doctrine of glory."² A son, Micheal, was born in 1922, which meant, among other things, that Williams had to find means to supplement his low income. Low wages were among the ancient standards the Press never allowed to lapse. An early poem of Williams, about Shakespeare, is more accurately a characterization of its own author.

I saw Shakespeare
 In a tube station on the Central London:
 He was smoking a pipe,
 He had Sax Rohmer's best novel under his arm
 (In a cheap edition)
 And the Evening News.
 He was reading in the half-detached way one does.
 He had just come away from an office
 And the notes for The Merchant
 Were in his pocket,
 Beginning (it was the first line he thought of)
 'still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims,'
 But his chief wish was to be earning more money.³

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2. Charles Williams, He Came Down From Heaven and the Forgiveness of Sins, 1956, p. 85. Note: Hereafter only the name of the essay in which the quotation appears will be referred to. It should always be understood that the same book is referred to by either title. Hereafter the first essay shall be referred to as He Came Down and the second as Forgiveness.
 3. Williams, Windows of Night, Oxford Univ. Press, (not dated but probably 1929) "On Meeting Shakespeare"

Although he had never formally completed his university education, he found a position lecturing for the London County Council. He continued lecturing in 'night schools' in London, and in the 1930's he lectured at the City Literary Institute and the Balham Commercial Institute. In 1938 he was invited to lecture at the Sorbonne and when the O.U.P. moved to Oxford in 1939 he lectured and tutored at the University. Oxford awarded him an honorary M.A. in 1943.

The pay was poor at the O.U.P. but through it Williams was able to meet the important literary people of the day, and pursue his own literary interests. He became the poet laureate of Amen House, writing 'myths' and masques to be performed in the reference library. He met, sometime in the 1930's, Dorothy Sayers and T.S. Eliot both of whom were to become his friends and admirers. Of the two, Miss Sayers became the greater admirer, especially for his work on Dante. She dedicated her translation of Dante's Hell and Purgatory "To the Dead Master of the Affirmations, Charles Williams."⁴ Williams absence from Paradise is accounted for by Miss Sayer's untimely death at the twentieth canto. The last of her Further Papers On Dante analyzes 'The Poetry of the Image in Dante and Charles Williams'.⁵

4. Dante, The Divine Comedy, translated by D. L. Sayers, Penguin Books, I:Hell, 1949, II:Purgatory, 1955.

5. D. L. Sayers, Further Papers on Dante, Harper & Bros. 1957, pp. 183 ff.

Through the O.U.P. Williams became acquainted with the works of Kierkegaard. He was, in part, in charge of the venture to publish Kierkegaard in English, and he handled the negotiations with Alexander Dru for the Press.⁶ Dru had contacted the Press in 1935; in December, 1936, in conjunction with the Princeton University Press, Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments was published. Williams took quite an interest in 'getting Kierkegaard into English'. Walter Lowrie's note, 'How Kierkegaard Got Into English' begins, "Mr. Charles Williams of the Oxford University Press, who from the first affectionately fostered the enterprise of publishing S. K.'s works in English, proposed to me several years ago that I ought to write a little book about the story."⁷ Later in the 'note' Lowrie, who was not well known for saying nice things about people, wrote, "Charles Williams is the only man I have ever taken to my heart 'unsight unseen. It was a wrench to both of us when eventually I had to withdraw from my association with the Oxford Press."⁸ Mrs. Hadfield thinks that Williams had the distinction of delivering the first public lecture on Kierkegaard in England.⁹

Doubtless, Kierkegaard had some affect on Williams's

6. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 126.

7. W. Lowrie, "How Kierkegaard Got Into English" essay printed after S. Kierkegaard, Repetition, Prin. Univ. Press, 1946, p. 177.

8. Ibid., p. 190.

9. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 126.

thinking, but to what extent, and in what way, have, so far, not been determined, nor probably ever will be. His last two novels, The Descent into Hell and All Hallow's Eve, are considerably different from his first five. These last two were published after he became acquainted with Kierkegaard, but the difference Kierkegaard made, if any, is not detectable. Williams introduced and edited The Present Age, by Kierkegaard published in 1940, but the introduction is ordinary and contains nothing in the way of 'how Kierkegaard has affected my thinking.' Likewise, the several pages on Kierkegaard in the Descent of the Dove offer no solution to this problem. Mrs. Hadfield feels that "there can have been no one in his generation more close than C. W. to the 'poet thinker', the ideal reader to whom Kierkegaard so often said he looked forward across the years."¹⁰

While Kierkegaard's influence on Williams is indeterminable, the influence of the Church of England and her theology is obvious. He was a life long and faithful member of the 'odd (but not for that, necessarily less sacred)' ¹¹Anglican Church, although his opinion of it and particularly its priests was generally low but tolerant. His estimation of her priests, he felt, was merely in the tradition begun

10. Ibid.

11. W. H. Auden, 'Introduction' to Williams, The Descent of the Dove, Meridian Books, 1958, p. x - presumably Auden is here quoting Williams.

by Christ himself.

The Divine thing that made itself the foundation of the church does not seem, to judge by his comments on the religious leaders of his day, ever to have hoped much from officers of a church. The most he would do was to promise that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. It is about all that, looking back on the history of the church, one can feel they have not done.¹²

Williams, like many other Englishmen, was interested in theology. Early in his life he became a member of 'The Theological Smokers', in St. Alban's, a group which "over pipes, cigarettes, coffee and cakes explored the universe, regretted nonconformity, (and) had a sneaking regard for but kept a wary eye on His Holiness."¹³ At O.U.P. he planned a book comparing the doctrines of the Anglican and the Roman Churches. A good deal of work was done on it; Williams had defined the main dogmas, but the book was never finished.¹⁴ He was deeply interested in the Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine in the Church of England, published in 1938, and enjoyed quoting and expounding it to his fellow workers.¹⁵ His interest in theology shows up clearly in his writings and it is hoped that this paper will not only make this apparent, (if it is

12. Williams, He Came Down, p. 78.

13. A. Ridler, 'Introduction' to The Image of the City and other Essays (of Charles Williams) ed. A. Ridler Oxford Univ. Press., 1958, Quoted by Mrs. Ridler, p. xv.

14. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 133.

15. Ibid., p. 132.

not already), but also reveal his profound grasp and novel use of theology and particularly of Anglican theology.

It is not entirely true, as Mrs. Shideler supposes that "His pattern of thought and interpretation of the Christian faith can hold their own in the high places where doctors debate these matters."¹⁶ There are great gaps and numerous obscurities in his theology, but to linger too long on these is to miss the point as surely as we should miss it if we were to spend our time proving the profundity of his system. Profundity there certainly is, but what is of more concern are his lively presentation and reinterpretation of this theology. What is of real interest is that in his writings we find "Christian theology in a new key, transposed to a fresh register; so that it appears as a new and exciting thing."¹⁷

In 1939, because of the war, the O.U.P. was decentralized and its offices moved to Oxford and Williams with them. These were hard but fruitful times for him. He had to leave two great loves behind: his wife and London. "Oxford is beautiful", he wrote, - "so long as one lives in London."¹⁸ They were fruitful times for in Oxford he came to be a member

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16. M.M. Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love, Harper & Bros., 1962, p. 1.
 17. Robert McAfee Brown, 'Charles Williams: Lay Theologian' in Theology Today, vol. X, no. 2, July 1953, p. 217.
 18. Ridler, oo. cit., p. xxix.

of one of those strange little groups which seem to flourish best, or only, on English soil. The story of this little group is briefly told by C.S. Lewis in the Introduction to a common undertaking of this group: Essays Presented to Charles Williams. The exact membership varied, but the core seems to have consisted of Williams, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, although Miss Sayers and Gervase Mathew seem to have been frequent participants. C.S. Lewis describes the group as a "fairly permanent nucleus among his (Williams's) literary friends." ¹⁹ The group was serious; they met twice a week: on Thursday evenings in Lewis's rooms and on Tuesdays mornings "in the best of all public-houses for draught cider, whose name it would be madness to reveal."²⁰ The activities of the group were simple. Williams "read us his manuscripts and we read him ours: we smoked, talked, argued, and drank together (I must confess that with Miss Dorothy Sayers I have seen him drink only tea: but that was neither his fault nor hers)."²¹ Tolkien, an English philologist, Beowulf and Chaucer scholar, who had two years before published his celebrated fantasy for children, The Hobbit, read to the group chapters which came to be included

19. Essays Presented to Charles Williams, Oxford Univ. Press, 1947, preface by C.S. Lewis, p. v.

20. Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

21. Ibid., p. v.

in volume one of his now complete trilogy, The Fellowship of the Ring. Lewis read his 'Christian, science fiction story, Perelandra, and Williams read All Hallow's Eve. Each chapter was read aloud and discussed as it was written. The works "owe a good deal to the hard-hitting criticism of the circle.^{21a}

The Oxford group was enthusiastic about Williams - if Lewis's introduction is representative. Lewis's enthusiasm approaches worship; whether it is more Lewis's concern to put things nicely than worship is hard to determine. Lewis's dedication to A Preface to Paradise Lost solemnly acknowledges the debt owed to Williams by Milton scholars.²² It was, however, as a person that Williams was most praised by his friends and colleagues. W. H. Auden has described him:

When I met Charles Williams I had read none of his books; our meetings were few and on business, yet I count them among my most unforgettable and precious experiences. I have met great and good men in whose presence one was conscious of one's own littleness: Charles Williams effect on me and on others with whom I have spoken was quite different: in his company one felt twice as intelligent and infinitely nicer than, out of it, one knew oneself to be. It wasn't simply that he talked well - but, more than anyone else I have ever known, he gave himself completely to the company that he was in....any conversation with Charles Williams, no matter how trivial . or impersonal the topic, was a genuine dialogue.²³

21a. Ibid., p. v.

22. C.S. Lewis, A Preface To Paradise Lost, Oxford Univ. Press, 1961, p. v.

23. Auden, 'Introduction' to The Descent of the Dove, p. v.

Lewis pays him the supreme compliment: "No event has so corroborated my faith in the next world as Williams did simply by dying. When the idea of death and the idea of Williams met in my mind, it was the idea of death that was changed."²⁴ Essays Presented to Charles Williams was intended as a token of friendship - as a 'Festschrift.' "Death," writes Lewis, "forestalled us; we now offer as a memorial what had been devised as a greeting."²⁵

Williams's friends noticed a double nature in him; he was interested in, and characterized by, extremes. He was the author of both Witchcraft and The Descent of the Dove. He acquainted himself with saints and devils and found both, in their own way, fascinating. He desired, it seems, to be neither. T.S. Eliot found him a saint,²⁶ Lewis, a paradox.

...while no man's conversation was less gloomy in tone - it was, indeed, a continual flow of gayety, enthusiasm, and high spirits - no man at times said darker things.²⁷

Williams, like other authors of the day, became interested in 'the heart of darkness.' He set about to study, understand and portray 'the deep abscess at the core of Being.'²⁸

24. Essays Presented to Charles Williams, p. xiv.

25. Ibid., p. vi.

26. A. Ridler, 'Introduction' to The Image of the City, p. xxviii.

27. Essays Presented to Charles Williams, p. xiii.

28. Williams, Windows of Night, p. 104, quoted by Hadfield, op. cit., p. 62.

Williams knew, in particular, his English literature - "Malory, Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson, Scott, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Patmore, and Chesterton he seemed to have at his finger's ends."³³

A Note on the Writings

Charles Williams wrote approximately forty books and more than two hundred shorter pieces.³⁴ Among the forty books are seven volumes of poetry, seven published plays, seven novels, two histories, four books of criticism, two long theological essays and six biographies. The great number and the diversity of his writings are accounted for by his widespread interests, his employment and his constant need for money. He began to write novels, he told a friend, "to pay my son's school fees."³⁵ His first and abiding love was poetry, but "Poetry," he said, "except as an indulgence, I can't afford."³⁶ A good part of his writing was determined by what would bring him money. In short, some of his books were pot-boilers; "but he always boiled an honest pot."³⁷

33. Ibid.

34. Shideler, op. cit., unnumbered beginning page

35. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 76.

36. Ibid., p. 201.

37. Williams, All Hallows' Eve, Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948, T.S. Eliot, 'Introduction, p. xii.

All of Williams's works are interrelated no matter what their subject. A selection of the most useful books for a study of his theological thought was difficult. Many of his reviews contain important theological ideas; this makes the problem more difficult. I have tried to use as much of his writing as I found possible, in part to show the impact theology made on all his thought. Much of his early poetry is uninspired and oppressively romantic. His later inspired poetry is frequently difficult.³⁸

My canon of selection with this was to use what I could understand or what I felt I could come to understand and not worry about the rest. His drama was always in verse and therefore presented a similar problem. I found however, his Seed of Adam, Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, House By The Stable and Grab and Grace particularly useful. The two theological essays, He Came Down From Heaven and The Forgiveness of Sins, along with The Figure of Beatrice and The Descent of the Dove are, of course, essential for understanding his thought. His theology takes on flesh and blood and comes to life in his novels, and especially in the last two, Descent Into Hell and All Hallows' Eve.

38. Difficult, certainly for me, but not for me alone. Mr. T.S. Eliot seems to have found Williams's poetry difficult. (cf. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 156). Williams returned the compliment: he found Eliot's poetry difficult to understand. (cf. Williams, Poetry At Present, Oxford Univ. Press, 1930, p. viii.)

A Note on His Readers, Critics, Interpreters and Admirers

Most of the discussion , critical or otherwise, about Williams has centered on his seven novels. The critics have, unanimously been perplexed at the outset with the genre of the novels. A critical game has sprung up in which each critic suggests one or more phrases to characterize the novels. So far, there has been no obvious winner. The phrases most in the running are: 'metaphysical mystery tales', 'fantastic thrillers', 'transcendental thrillers', 'supernatural melodramas', 'supernatural hugger-muggers', 'theological thrillers', 'religious melodramas, fantasies', 'fairy stories, metaphysical thrillers', and ' spiritual shockers'. Edmund Fuller suggests that the novels resemble what fruit might result if a Dorothy Sayers detective story were grafted onto the Apocalypse of St. John³⁹ and John Heath-Stubbs suggests that 'they belong, broadly, to the same literary genre as the stories of Sheridan Le Fanu... Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, and M.R. James."⁴⁰ Thus it can be seen that there is considerable agreement even if the exact genre has not been discovered. The novels, we are usually told, are 'different.'

39. Edmund Fuller, Books With Men Behind Them, Random House, 1962, p. 197.

40. John Heath-Stubbs, 'Charles Williams', pamphlet no. 63 in the 'Writers and Their Work' series. Longmans Green & Co., 1955, p. 7.

No such agreement is apparent on the value of the novels. Mrs. Hadfield thinks that they "are clearly a good introduction for a beginner."⁴¹ W. H. Auden finds them "the least satisfactory of his books"⁴² and John Heath-Stubbs "the least important."⁴³ Robert McAfee Brown recommends them⁴⁴ and Edmund Fuller vigorously recommends and defends them.⁴⁵ Generally, the literary man has fewer good things to say about the novels than the Christian commentator.

Similarly, there is no agreement on which of the novels is the finest. Heath-Stubbs calls The Place of the Lion "the most brilliant, perhaps, of the novels,"⁴⁶ and Fuller thinks The Greater Trumps "one of the finest."⁴⁷ The cumulative sense of his critics is, generally speaking, that the last novels, The Descent Into Hell and All Hallows' Eve are of greater value than the first five. At any rate, they are different and stand in contrast to the first five.

Even those who feel his novels are not his best work can not agree on where we are to find it. "The fullest and most brilliant expression of his outlook", writes

41. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 77.

42. Auden, 'Introduction' to The Descent of the Dove p. v.

43. Heath-Stubbs, op. cit., p. 28.

44. Robert McAfee Brown, op. cit., the import of the whole article.

45. Fuller, op. cit., p. 197 f.f.

46. Heath-Stubbs, op. cit., p. 30.

47. Fuller, op. cit., p. 211.

Lewis, "is to be found in his mature poetry, and especially in Taliessin Through Logres, and The Region of the Summer Stars."⁴⁸ Furthermore, he proclaims them "to be among the two or three most valuable books of verse produced in the century."⁴⁹ His criticism, Lewis thinks, is the least valuable of all his work.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Auden recommends some of the criticism, and calls The Descent of the Dove Williams's masterpiece.⁵¹ One of Williams's critics thinks that his "plays represent a significant contribution to the verse drama"⁵² even though in several of the earlier plays "one really has very little idea of what is actually going on, and when people are killed one needs the stage directions to know who has killed whom."⁵³

Williams was able to collect the strangest bits and pieces of forgotten or non-existent cultures, myths, magic and metaphysics, dump them in twentieth century London or in the country-side and somehow organize it all into novels. War in Heaven centers about the quest for the Holy Grail, discovered after so many years, in a church at Fardles. Strange salves and occult rites of black magic figure

48. Essays Presented to Charles Williams, p. vi.

49. Ibid., p. vii.

50. Ibid.

51. Auden, 'Introduction' to The Descent of the Dove.

52. William Spanos, 'Charles Williams' Judgement at Chelmsford: A Study in the Aesthetic of Sacramental Time', The Christian Scholar, XLV/2 Summer, 1962, p. 107.

53. Hadfield, op. cit., p. 106.

heavily in the plot. In Many Dimensions the central gimmick is the stone of Solomon which can, among other marvelous things, transport humans magically through time and space. The Tarot cards and the magic powers they represent almost destroy England and perhaps the world in The Greater Trumps. Shadows of Ecstasy (originally The Black Bastard) begins with the second evolution of man deep in Africa. In The Place of the Lion the platonic universals (or neo-platonic universals) come down from heaven and are incarnate. Fierce disorder breaks out until the universals, in the form of animals, are named as Adam named the beasts. Descent Into Hell is different. There is no magical instrument or phenomenon around which the plot moves. The plot is that "a group of amateurs got together and produced a play."⁵⁴ But one of the recurring characters lives in purgatory, another is a siren or a witch, and the burdens of a sixteenth century Marian martyr are borne by a girl living four hundred years later. A one-sentence description of the heroine of All Hallows' Eve is sufficient to show that the plot is out of the ordinary. "She was a quite ordinary and rather lucky, girl, and she was dead."⁵⁵ These odd bits and pieces are, in part, what make the novels so interesting

54. Robert McAfee Brown, op. cit., p. 213.

55. Williams, All Hallows' Eve, Faber and Faber Ltd. 1955, p. 13. All further references to All Hallows' Eve shall be to this edition. Hereafter it shall be referred to as Eve.

and wonderfully weird - but only in part. A criticism made of Descent Into Hell, that it "has small heaps of oddities lying about among gaps that need to be filled"⁵⁶ can be made of the other novels as well. "There is always in his fiction," writes one critic, "something plainly foolish or plainly unassimilated which encourages the reader to follow his inclination toward reducing the novels to rubble and perhaps to remember all their terms and ideas, in the end as simply queer."⁵⁷

The critics, so far, have not come to any agreement on Williams. What makes him 'significant' to one critic makes him passé to the other. He is loved by some and despised by others for the same reason. Some feel that the novels are pious Christian pap, others that they are demonic attacks on the faith. Some enjoy his attacks on romanticism, others dismiss him as a romantic. Some think he restores "the sense of the awesome, the other, the holy, in our religious life",⁵⁸ others that he is not particularly religious. In short, Williams is exactly where he wished to be: neither on one side or the other.

His ambivalent position has caused a promotion problem. Are his books theological stories, mysteries, or tales of

56. J. L. Stewart, 'Charles Williams Fiction', The Sewanee Review, Vol. LVIII, Winter, 1950, No. 1, p. 161.

57. Ibid., pp. 160-161.

58. Fuller, op. cit., p. 204.

terror and the supernatural? To what audience should they be recommended? - the Shalom^o Asch set?, the Earle Stanley Gardner mob?, or the Saki fans? James King touches on this problem:

First impressions of the work of this stern-visaged Englishman were perhaps not favorable, for corpses that refuse to answer phone calls, sparkling social satire, hanged men who continue to live actively, and exceedingly difficult prose do not constitute the stuff of the standard 'edifying' religious novel. ⁵⁹

The critical work on Williams has been done by friends, admirers and experts. The categories are not intended to be exclusive; C.S. Lewis is, of course, all three. In general the work was begun by his friends and continued by admirers. The experts are now beginning to discuss him. Between 1950 and 1958 I have been able to discover only three journal articles on Williams. Seven articles have been published since 1958. At the moment there are only two full length books on him and his thought:

M.A. Hadfield's biographical and critical Introduction to Charles Williams (1959) and M. M. Shideler's Theology of Romantic Love (1962). C.S. Lewis's Arthurian Torso (1948) contains Williams's unfinished history of the Arthurian myth and a critical discussion of his Arthurian poetry by

59. James King, 'Christian Fantasy in the Novels of C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams', The Journal of Religious Thought, Vol. xi, Autumn-Winter, 1953-54, no. 1, p. 46.

Lewis. Mrs. Ridler has written a good critical introduction for her collection of Williams's articles and essays, entitled The Image of the City and Other Essays (1958), and John Heath-Stubb's pamphlet number 63 in the 'Writers and Their Works' series is on Williams (1955). So far Williams has been the subject of only one published dissertation, An Immortality For Its Own Sake: A Study of the Concept of Poetry in the Writings of Charles Williams (1954)^{59a} His 'mythic material', along with those of C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot have been examined by Charles Moorman in Arthurian Triptych (1960) and Williams is one of the men behind the books Edmund Fuller selects to write about in Books With Men Behind Them. (1962)

The Purpose, Scope and Method of the Paper

This paper belongs, roughly, to the field of 'theology and literature.' There has, in our day, been a resurgence of interest in this field; more and more writers, both Christian and non-Christian, are contributing to its literature. The field remains, however, fuzzily defined. The purpose, problems and methods of this field have never been clearly defined. There are, within this field, those whose main concern is Christian literary criticism. They seek a critical position based on aesthetic values derived

59a. J. P. Gigrich

from Christian doctrine. Edmund Fuller's Man In Modern Fiction⁶⁰ is a good example of the aims and methods of the Christian literary critics. There are those who are primarily concerned with examining and comparing the way of life of the artist and the Christian. These writers seek to show the similarities between the world-views of the artist and the Christian. Their discussions usually center on the creative imagination, the attitude toward nature, and the rigor of the two communities. Others are primarily interested in drawing out the theological implications of secular literature. The purpose of their work has been either to find grounds for common understanding or to vivify a rationalistic theology with flesh and blood examples and insights. These last interests have been the most fruitful for both literature and theology. They are also the most difficult to carry out. Neither the search for common understanding nor the attempts at revitalization has been carried out without corruption. In the first case authors have been baptised in disregard of their intentions; in the second the attempt at revitalization has sometimes been little more than a quiet search for spiritual resources.

This paper is neither an exercise in Christian literary criticism, nor a comparison of the two communities, nor

60. Vintage Books, 1958.

in general an attempt to draw out the theological implications of Williams fiction. Williams was both a theologian and a writer. He presents special problems. His literary work and his theological writings are interrelated: the novels clarify the theology, the theology clarifies the novels. Even his criticism is closely related and dependent on his theology. The Figure of Beatrice illustrates this. It is a book of Dante criticism, "a beautiful and illuminating guide to the allegory"⁶¹; but it is also a discussion of a way of life and its theological examination and defense. His novels are wild tales; yet their characters are living the implications of his theology. His doctrines take on flesh and blood in the novels - or else the doctrines form the background in which the characters live and act. His theology enlivens (in the literal sense of the word) the novels.

In Williams we have the Christian writer. The 'writer as Christian'⁶² is not, at the moment, the fashionable investigation in the field of theology and literature. Often the distinction has not been made. The writer as a Christian is not merely a Christian who happens to write.⁶³ Such

61. Divine Comedy, translated by D.L. Sayers, I:Hell p. 346.

62. Macolm Ross, 'The Writer as Christian', Faculty Papers published by the National Council of P.E.C.U.S.A. in the pamphlet entitled 'History and Christianity. II:The answer by Brooks Otis, p. 17.

63. Ibid., p. 18.

a simple definition would lead to great confusion, especially in our day when "if any man so much as guess out loud that mysteries may lie beyond the range of telescope and microscope, he is acclaimed at once as a seer, mystic, prophet, saint."⁶⁴ Ross defines the Christian writer as one "consciously dedicated to the realization of a specifically Christian vision of reality."⁶⁵

Williams's means of presenting a Christian vision of reality were symbols and myths. Therefore the method I have followed in this paper is to conceptualize, interpret and criticize these symbols and myths.⁶⁶ I have tried to bring together the various moments in Williams's theology into a conceptual scheme. As the title of this paper indicates, description is my first concern, then interpretation, and finally criticism. Quite often I do not go beyond description and interpretation, either because the criticism is obvious or because it would require research which time would not allow.

Chapter One conceptualizes, organizes and relates the important doctrines in the theology. The following chapters deal more specifically with these doctrines.

64. Ibid., p. 18.

65. Ibid., p. 17.

66. cf. Tillich, 'Theology and Symbolism' in Religious Symbolism, ed. by F. Ernest Johnson, published by The Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955. "Theology deals with religious symbols by conceptualization, explanation, and criticism." p. 111.

Chapter One is my 'thesis'. The rest is commentary.

Williams's interests were primarily literary. I have not discussed literary questions except when they were necessary for illuminating the theology. I, necessarily, have had to drain and bottle the blood of the novels, poetry and drama; and contrary to Leviticus, the blood is not the life - at least not the whole life. There are certainly many more things to be said about the thought of Charles Williams than I have attempted to say.

Finally, the paper is written for those who are familiar with the writings of Charles Williams.

CHAPTER 1

THE TRINITY AND EXISTENCE: CO-INHERENCE

It is difficult to find an organizing principle in Williams's theology; a principle or concept around which his thought can be presented in some systematic way. Williams was writing about the nature of reality as he saw it with the eyes of a Christian and quite naturally he wrote stories, poems, plays and histories. We of lesser imagination must settle for organized descriptions, systems, essays and so forth. Williams's talent lay in his ability to present the reality which he experienced in a highly imaginative way. Some of us must settle for less imaginative achievements: descriptions and definitions. Williams avoided definitions - it was a necessity in his vision of reality. "The reluctance to define", he wrote "(is) one of the graces bestowed by God on the church."¹ The blessed ambiguity of existence, of the acts of existence and language, is prized by him and follows propositionally from his doctrine of co-inherence. Definition

1. Williams, Witchcraft, p. 82.

to Williams usually meant reduction, a narrowing of reality - a finitizing of the infinite. He avoided defining in this sense and preferred what he called 'the logic of poetry'.² What language and consequently reality has come to be in the systems of the logical positivists, symbolic logicians, and linguistic analysts, perhaps indicates that Williams apprehensions were neither eccentric nor irrational in this case at least. Williams always pleaded for order and accuracy, but to him, order and accuracy meant seeing and understanding the interrelationship of the whole of creation and that which is above creation. I say this in order to make it clear that in attempting some systematic presentation of his theology, I necessarily must present a perversion of what Charles Williams actually thought. It is a perversion not only because I might read him wrong here, emphasize the wrong point there, but because to lay out his vision of reality systematically 'like a patient etherized upon a table' is, in itself, a perversion of his basic position. But then the grace bestowed by God on his church is the reluctance, not the refusal, to define. I hope my reluctance to define is sufficient to allow me to

2. Williams, Many Dimensions, Faber and Faber, 1957, p. 112. Here the phrase refers to the logic of all Englishmen. The phrase expresses Williams's logic perfectly.

co-inhere in this grace - as Williams would put it.

After much reading and thought about Williams, I have come to the opinion that the basic concept, or image, or reality (actually it's really none of these and at the same time all) in the thought of Charles Williams is the Holy Trinity. If this is so, if I am right, then Williams seems to me to be unique in doing what every theologian recommends but rarely practises: grounding the whole theological system on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Mrs. Shideler has organized her examination of Williams's thought around his theology of romantic love, as the title of her book sufficiently indicates.^{2a} The Theology of Romantic Love was certainly William's earliest and most abiding concern, but yet I think that the pieces of his thought never really fell together until he had fully understood and formulated what he called the doctrine of co-inherence, which is his understanding of the mode or the existence of the Trinity. His system begins with co-inherence and ends with co-inherence. Those few times when he presented his ideas in what can be lightly styled as propositional seem to bear out the centrality of this image. Besides co-inherence, the two other abiding concerns of Williams were the Way of the Affirmation of

2a. Shideler, The Theology of Romantic Love.

Images and romantic love. That way of being or existing or more simply, but less correctly, living characterized by the phrase the Way of the Affirmation of Images is grounded in the reality of co-inherence. If co-inherence is not an accurate image for the reality of this creation, then the Way of the Affirmation of Images is meaningless. Images are authentic images because of the nature of creation as co-inherence. And the way of romantic love, that mode of existence which Mrs. Shideler takes as Williams's central doctrine is, according to Williams himself, only a particular mode of the general way of the affirmation of images.³ It is co-inherence then that makes both the Way of the Affirmation of Images and romantic love possible. To go from the particular to the general, romantic love is part of a greater mode of existence which Williams calls the Way of the Affirmations of Images, which in turn, is grounded in the fact of co-inherence.

Having established the centrality and importance of co-inherence, it seems appropriate to ask what the word means. Unfortunately Williams gives us little help here. The word seems to have come into his vocabulary in about 1938 and to have persisted.⁴ However the basic images and

3. Williams, The Figure of Beatrice, Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 16. This work hereafter will be cited as Beatrice.

4. Hadfield, oo. cit., p. 136.

concepts which are included in the meaning of co-inherence were present in his writings from the very beginning. Mr. Spanos has defined co-inherence as "Williams' term for the organic and sacramental relationship between the things of time and of eternity."⁵ Mr. Spanos's definition is, however, limited by his particular interest in the aesthetic of sacramental time. While his definition is not incorrect, it is, at best, inadequate. Mrs. Shideler defines co-inherence variously as the "play of interaction among separate identities"⁶ and "the infinite interdependence among individual things."⁷ While these definitions express a part of what co-inherence is, they don't begin to exhaust its meaning. In The Figure of Beatrice Williams refers his readers to chapter twenty-four of G. L. Prestige's God In Patristic Theology for "the clearest exposition I know of the theological definition of the Divine life in this sense" (i.e. the sense of co-inherence). He adds, "Humanly, the word stands for the idea of the 'in- othering' and 'in-Godding' of men which appears in Dante."⁸ The title of Prestige's chapter is 'Co-inherence.' Whether 'co-inherence' was Prestige's translation of the greek 'perichoresis' or the latin 'circumincessio' is not clear nor, I suppose,

5. William Spanos, op.cit., p. 113, footnote 13.

6. Shideler, op. cit., p. 47.

7. Ibid., p. 62.

8. Williams, Beatrice, p. 92, footnote 1.

pertinent. Co-inherence is not a biblical word, and, in fact, there is some question if it is a word at all. Neither Webster's Third New International Dictionary (unabridged) nor the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church shows any awareness of its existence.

According to Prestige, the word 'perichoresis' was first applied to the Trinity by 'Pseudo-Cyril'⁹ and popularized by John of Damascus.¹⁰ Pseudo-Cyril and John of Damascus used the word to refer to the mutual interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity. Pseudo-Cyril and John of Damascus were primarily interested in understanding the possibility of unity in Trinity. They were interested in what we might call 'celestial mathematics' - in how something could be three and one at the same moment. Prestige's chapter preserves the rather dull and intricately metaphysical nature of the speculations on co-inherence.

For Charles Williams this bit of speculation lying in the penumbra of Trinitarian metaphysics came alive. It came alive because Williams was not interested in the problems which occupied the minds of Pseudo-Cyril or John of Damascus. He was not interested in the problem of unity in Trinity. In his understanding of the Trinity he belongs

9. G. L. Prestige, God In Patristic Theology, William Heinemann Ltd., 1936, p. 184.

10. Ibid., p. 299.

to that group of theological thinkers who have been interested in the dynamics of the relationship between the persons of the Trinity: to the tradition found in Augustine and Richard of St. Victor, and to those theologians of what is commonly known as the social Trinity. Co-inherence, for Williams was the basic expression of the relationship between the Persons of the God-head. And co-inherence expresses a dynamic, not a static relationship. Co-inherence is "the manner by which it (the Trinity) exists."¹¹

Co-inherence is a cold, metaphysical term, but its ambiguity seems to have pleased Williams. That the Trinity exists in the manner of co-inherence in no way excludes a relationship of love among the Persons. Co-inherence includes within it the relationship of love - of divine love. In fact, co-inherence is precisely that state of love in which the divine Persons exist. Co-inherence is the ultimate act and culmination of love. It is "the absolute relationship, or at least it is one than which nothing more can be imagined or expressed."¹² Perfect love is perfect unity, perfect co-inherence.

Many theologians have used human analogies, the analogy of human consciousness, or the analogy of the

11. Williams, Beatrice, p. 92.

12. Ibid., p. 190.

family, as aids in helping our understanding of the essential mystery of the Trinity. Williams inverts this practice. Rather than explicating the Trinity through human analogies, he explicates existence through his understanding of the Trinity. Co-inherence, the manner by which the Trinity exists, is the basic fact of our existence, and of creation itself. Co-inherence is "the root and the pattern of the supernatural as of the natural world."¹³ It is both a metaphysical reality and an existential fact. It is the ontological fact of our existence. True Being is co-inherent Being.

The created order was created in the image of the Trinity. That is, at its root lies the fact of co-inherence. All creation mirrors and participates in this co-inherence. Co-inherence did not begin with the coming of Christ but with creation itself.¹⁴ Nor does it need Christian doctrine or revelation to expose it. The constant life and death of natural phenomena, the cycles and balances of nature, the infinite interrelationship of all creation expose and express it. "It was as clear to the pagans that in society men depended on each other exteriorly as

13. Williams, The Descent of the Dove, p. 235.
Hereafter cited as Dove.

14. Ibid., p. 69.

it is to us. The whole natural and social world depended then, as now, on some process of exchange."¹⁵

What is true of creation in general is true of man in particular. Co-inherence "is the intended principle of our being; it is the function for which we were created, and not it for us."¹⁶ The principle of co-inherence is "true of the whole nature of man."¹⁷ Even our bodies, in their own way, participate in the co-inherence. "We experience, physically, in its proper mode, the kingdom of God: the imperial structure of the body carries its own high doctrines - of vision, of digestion of mysteries, of balance, of movement, of operation."¹⁸ The practical formula which expresses the fact of co-inherence in man and its implications was uttered, according to Williams, by Anthony the hermit: "Alone, ascetic, emaciated, he gave to the church the same formula: 'Your life and death are with your neighbor'".¹⁹ All mankind is bound up in the 'web of glory' - the glorious interchanges of the divine co-inherence.

But somehow, for man the web of glory snapped. It.

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- 15. Charles Williams: Selected Writings, chosen by Anne Ridler, Oxford Univ. Press, 1961, p. 125. Hereafter this work shall be cited as Selected Writings.
 - 16. Williams, Beatrice, p. 92.
 - 17. Williams, Selected Writings, pp. 126-127.
 - 18. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 87.
 - 19. Williams, Dove, p. 46.

became, in man's eyes, the net of hell. Co-inherence became a great burden for man. Man wished to be excused from its demands. He wished to relinquish the benefits of eternity. He renounced the existence of the Trinity in favor of - as it turned out, a multitheism - for the godhood of all men. The result? Williams agreed with Yeats:

Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every-where
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity. 20

This is expressed in the myth of the Fall. Man, having fallen comes to know the co-inherence as the source of most of his troubles. He must live in and through others? That is weakness, and usually painful. He must live for others? That is worse yet. Man was slowly sinking into that existence which is the negation of the existence of the Trinity. Man was slowly sinking into Hell. But God was not willing to cancel creation, and co-inherence. The Trinity was not willing to release man from the perfection or its own existence. The unwillingness meant, for mankind great suffering. This co-inherence made existence obscene. Since the fall, life needs life to live. The existence of others is resented, denied, denied even

20. W. B. Yeats, (from) 'The Second Coming'.

physically through murder. No matter what man does, the good is destroyed. If one man has, another has not. This is the outrage of existence. We need forgiveness for our very existence. Williams uses the Holy Innocents as an image of the outrage, of the obscenity in the universe. In Shadows of Ecstasy he writes of Roger Ingram what might well be written of all of us: "He was accepting blood, as all men do by living."²¹ But God chose to sustain creation, as He does even now when men deny the co-inherence in their lives. He chose to sustain it and to redeem it.

Christology and co-inherence are combined in an incredibly complex system of imagery in Williams's writings. The Incarnation is at once the revelation of the nature of co-inherence and its redemption. The two natures of Christ share the existence of the Trinity. They exist in a state of co-inherence. The mortal maternity of Christ fascinated Williams. He used it as a key image for the proliferation of other images. The incarnation was the divine choice of the Divine Word.

Had he willed, he could presumably have raised for his Incarnation a body in some other way than he chose. But he preferred to shape himself within the womb, to become hereditary, to owe to humanity the flesh he divinitized by the same principle - 'not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God.'²²

21. Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy. Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1950, p. 200, Hereafter cited as Shadows.

22. Williams, Dove, p. 235.

The co-inherence of man and God which is revealed in the incarnation images the ultimate possibilities of existence. Our function, the function for which all men are created, is to be "the motherhood of the Incarnation."²³ No man reaches heaven by himself. Only through others can Christ be presented, and only in the co-inherence can He be known. The 'he in us and we in him' of the communion service expresses this new relationship of redeemed co-inherence.

The way of romantic love is one way in which man's function of the motherhood of God is fulfilled. Williams's greatest image of this possibility was the Dante-Beatrice story. The Beatrician moment is that moment in which the beloved becomes "the chosen Mother of the goodwill of God."²⁴ In romantic love Williams saw a legitimate stage on the way to, and a true image of, the life of co-inherence. The exposition of the nature and dynamics of this way, what it was like and how it worked, occupies much of his writings.

Romantic love is, however, only one way within what Williams calls the Way of the Affirmation of Images. For Williams the doctrine of co-inherence applies to the whole of creation. Everything found in creation can be known as an illustration or an image of the existence of the Trinity. And Williams meant everything. How far he was

23. Williams, Beatrice, p. 92.

24. Williams, He Came Down, p. 71.

willing to carry the Way of the Affirmation of Images can be seen in an incident in All Hallows' Eve. Evelyn (the dead girl who is descending into hell) and Lester (the dead girl who is ascending into the life of co-inherence) standing on the bank of the Thames, meditate on the debris floating by. To Evelyn the debris is an outrageous and ugly sight: dreadful and disgusting. But to Lester, looking through the eyes of co-inherence, the debris is part of the web of glory. "A sodden mass of cardboard and paper drifted by, but the soddenness was itself a joy, for this was what happened, and all that happened in this great material world, was good."²⁵ It was this particular way which Williams chose for his own life. His interest in Dante was an interest both in romantic love and the Way of the Affirmation of Images. The Divine Comedy

...is the greatest expression in European literature of the way of approach of the soul to its ordained end through the affirmation of the validity of all those images, beginning with the image of a girl. ²⁶

Creation originally, and consequently redeemed creation, participate in this co-inherence. Therefore the principles of existence, and the nature of things in our creation, in nature, do not differ significantly from existence and the nature of 'supernature.' The difference is in degree, not

25. Williams, All Hallows' Eve, Faber & Faber, 1960. Hereafter cited as Eve.

26. Williams, Beatrice, p. 8.

in kind. Nature and the supernatural co-inhere; they participate one in the other. In the same way, time and eternity co-inhere. Many of Williams's novels and plays presuppose these co-inherences. It is this understanding of the co-inherence of nature and supernatural, time and eternity which accounts for most of the weird (some prefer queer) happenings and effects in his drama.

It would not be unfair to Williams to say that for him creation was - might we not call it? - the moving image of the Trinity. All things and all men are created by the Trinity and in its image. We are an extension of its existence. I have briefly outlined the way in which Williams understood creation, the doctrine of man and Christology in relation to the Trinity. At the heart of each doctrine stands the reality of the existence of the Trinity. The next chapters of my paper will analyze in more detail Williams understanding of these doctrines.

CHAPTER II

CREATION AND THE LOSS OF CO-INHERENCE

Charles Willaims never intended his theology to be anything but orthodox. Whether he fulfilled his intention I shall not consider here. Intending orthodoxy, then, Williams turned where most Christians before had turned for an understanding of the Creation: to Genesis. He turned, however, to the Genesis accounts with a particular notion of what the Bible was all about, and this notion is worth considering. "The whole Canon," he wrote, "signifies a particular thing - the original nature of man, the entrance of contradiction into his nature, and the manner of his restoration."¹ The Bible presents descriptions of various "states of being." In fact, "the whole of the Bible is a nexus of states of being; a pattern developed in a proper sequence from its bare opening through all its enlarging theme."² While Israel is their chosen revealer, these states of being are not peculiar to Israel. They are universal. The Bible is a handbook of the spirit. It records what did happen.

1. Williams, He Came Down, p. 14.

2. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

But it is not mere history, for "all that did happen is a presentation of what is happening; all the historical events, especially of this category, are a pageant of the events of the human soul."³ Williams's conception of the Bible is almost precisely opposite to that conception of the Bible as the book of the acts of God. So too is his principle of interpretation. The Bible is to be read as one would read a poem, and especially as one would read the Divine Comedy. In the Descent of the Dove he makes this clear.

As we contemplate the images of the poets, so the allegorizers studied the texts of scripture. It is obvious that this is the most valuable, perhaps the only valuable, method with much of the text of the Bible. ⁴

The Bible, then, is an allegory of the soul. We get at what the Bible is about "by the contemplation of the states of being the book describes."⁵ In this sense, then, Williams's novels, poetry and drama are re-presentations^s of the message and meaning of the Bible. His literary work was an attempt to portray, in the intensity of the moment, states of being which he discovered in the Bible.

3. Ibid., p. 12.

4. Williams, Dove, p. 38. Williams is here conceding a point to the allegorizers. He goes on to say that "it is obvious also that it lends itself to the wildest vagaries..." p. 38. Nevertheless he has in fact conceded a point to the allegorizers, and his method of interpretation was much of the time, allegorical.

5. Williams, He Came Down, p. 15.

Approximately eighteen centuries of biblical criticism have shown that when you search the Bible for states of being, you find states of being; and when you search for allegory you don't go empty away. Williams, of course, found both. Over one-half of his long (one hundred page) essay, He Came Down From Heaven is devoted to biblical exegesis. One-half of his interpretations are pedestrian, or perhaps commonplace, the other half, curious. It is in this essay that he works out his basic theological position, emphasizing, as his understanding of the Bible would indicate, the doctrine of man.

The Creation: Substance Is Value

William Temple has argued philosophically and stated propositionally what Williams derived from the biblical imagery and stated poetically in the first two chapters of He Came Down From Heaven and elsewhere. Temple, in chapter one of Christus Veritas, entitled "The Structure of Reality" argues that "Substance is and can be nothing but value."⁶ Temple is using 'substance' here as a synonym for, or an equivalent of, 'fundamental reality.' This was Williams's habit also. Temple writes:

6. William Temple, Christus Veritas, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1954, p. 15.

Now if the structure of Reality is such as we described, and if the problem of Metaphysics is to be approached along the lines now indicated, we begin to see a great unification take place. The lower grades, we said, only attain to the fullness of their own being so far as they are indwelt and dominated by those above them. They exist then ultimately, to embody or symbolise what is more than themselves. The Universe is sacramental. Everything except the Creative will exists to be the expression of that will, the actualization of its values and the communication of those values to spirits created for the special value actualised through fellowship in creation and appreciation of values. 7

The Trinity created in its own image - the image of co-inherence. The co-inherence is precisely the structure of reality. It is the great unifying principle; it relates every created image to every other created image and finally to God. We indwell and are indwelt by others and by God. We are, as everything else is, potent symbols. Williams and Temple agree: "The Universe is sacramental."

There is another important fact about this structure. It is, one might say, the crucial fact: it is good. "Earth exists and is good; the man and woman - the Adam - exist and are good; and their whole state is good."⁸ Mrs. Ridler quite rightly says "At the centre of Williams's teaching lies this dogma, that the whole universe is to be known as good."⁹ A further quotation from Temple says better than I am able, what this meant for Williams.

7. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

8. Williams, He Came Down, p. 17. "The Adam" here, of course, stands for both the man and the woman.

9. Ridler, op. cit., p. xxx.

Thus the whole universe is created to reflect . the manifold goodness of the Creator, and to produce within itself beings who may share with the Creator His joy in the goodness of the created thing. Symbolism is thus the supreme philosophic principle. The universe exists to reveal the goodness of God so far as it evolves intelligences capable of receiving the revelation.¹⁰

The life of man was to be a reflection of "the manifold goodness of the Creator." The life of co-inherence was to reflect the mode of the existence of the Trinity, and this co-inherence was nothing other than perfect love. God was to be seen in the whole of creation, and our life in and for all created beings was to be life in Him. Man was created to share in the life of the Trinity. We were to be 'in Him' and He was to be 'in us!'" We were created to exist for others, and others for us. Creation was one compact solidarity in love. The substance of reality was co-inherence, and co-inherence was Divine love. Substance then is value, or as Williams put it, "This we know - substance is love, love substance." ¹¹

It was, of course, not necessary that God should create. It was not necessary to God as God and even to God as love. Creation was, in the best sense, gratuitous. This means that we created beings are originally and

10. Temple, op. cit., p. 19.

11. Williams, The House By The Stable in Religious Drama 3, selected and introduced by Marvin Halverson, Meridian Books, 1961, p. 51. cf. Witcraft, p. 14.

continuously.superfluous. We are necessary neither to God nor to our neighbors. And we are more than philosophically or theologically superfluous. We can, ultimately create nothing, and forgive no-one. When God sent his son to redeem his creation, he sent him not only when we were yet sinners, but while we were yet, as always, superfluous. It has been one of the faults of so-called Christian existentialism that they have not remembered our superfluity. Parts of Williams's theology are properly existential, but nowhere in it do we find men thrusting themselves into authentic existence or admonitions to take life,in spite of its absurdity, more seriously or more courageously. This existential breast beating must have struck Williams as divinely humorous.

The state of being Williams sees manifested in the creation is co-inherence. Man existing in God and in and for others. This state was perverted and lost. It became known and experienced as evil. The myth of the Fall presents this new state.

We Came Down From Heaven

The myth of the Fall presents us with the second great state of being - the state of discord. The myth for Williams is a diagram of the origin of a new relationship of man to God and man to man. As it happened then, it

happens now in our own hearts. Williams considers the fall an historical fact; it happened back there, we know not how and it happens in all men. In this state, the beatitude of creation becomes the burden of existence.

Williams's analysis of the Fall seems superficial and scholastic. The roots of his understanding of the Fall lie in Augustine, but his analysis lacks the profound psychological insights of Augustine. The Fall, in his system, seems to be little more than an experiment in logic, successfully carried out. "The nature of the Fall," he writes, "is clearly defined."¹²

The 'fruit of the tree' is to bring an increase of knowledge. That increase, however, is, and is desired as being, of a particular kind. It is not merely to know more, but to know in another method. It is primarily the advance (if it can be so called) from knowing good to knowing good and evil; it is (secondarily) the knowing 'as gods': a certain knowledge was, by its nature confined to divine beings. ¹³

It was this 'knowing in another method' which Williams came to emphasize as the crucial inspiration and result of the Fall.¹⁴ The knowing as gods, he says, is 'secondary.' Originally the inhabitants of paradise knew good. There was, in fact, nothing else to know. They knew good and they knew correctly; but they also knew that

12. Williams, He Came Down, p. 19.

13. Ibid., (The underlining is mine)

14. He entitles his chapter on the Fall in He Came Down From Heaven, 'The Myth of the Alteration in Knowledge'. p. 17.

there was some alternative to the good. There had to be some hint of this alternative in order that they might know the good as good. They also knew that God knew more than they. God, in order to know the good, needed to know evil and to know it absolutely. But God knew evil, according to Williams, who borrows this delicate metaphysical distinction from Thomas, only by 'simple intelligence.'¹⁵ 'Simple intelligence', which at first seems to be a rather dubious virtue, is merely knowing something without calling it into being. Man, however, did not share this attribute of 'simple intelligence' with the Godhead. He was able to know only experientially. In knowing evil, the Adam had to know by experience.¹⁶ What did man wish to know, and by wishing come to know, and by knowing come to experience? "It was merely to wish to know an antagonism in the good, to find out what the good would be like if a contradiction were introduced into it."¹⁷ I call Williams account of the Fall an essay in experimental logic for this reason. Mankind stumbled across the negative and put it to use; not only propositionally, for only God could negate in this way unharmed, but experientially. Man wished to know and employ and experience the negative in his life. This

15. Williams, He Came Down, p. 20.

16. Ibid., p. 16.

17 Ibid., p. 20.

was the knowledge of God; it became for man, the knowledge of hell. Williams introduces the argument of the necessity of free will in a relationship of love in order to account for the possibility of negation in the life of man. "Some possibility of opposite action there must be if there is to be any relation between wills."¹⁸

Two events in the Genesis narrative show that this new alteration in knowledge has, in fact, come about. The first is the experience of shame in the life of the Adam over their sex and the second is their shame before God illustrated by their attempt to hide from God when He came walking in the cool of the day. There was nothing wrong with creation; God was the same; good was in its usual abundance; but the Adam had changed. The Adam was the same - they only knew differently: "All difference consists in the mode of knowledge."¹⁹ The creatures, Adam and Eve, made 'aprons' for themselves. Some have mistakenly assumed that the evil lay in what they made, that is, in the aprons themselves, or that it lay in the shame. The aprons and the shame were both results of this new knowledge - they were accidents of which the new knowledge of the good as evil was the substance. "Since then it has often been thought

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

that we might recover the single and simple knowledge of good in that respect by tearing up the aprons. It has never, so far, been found that the return is quite so easy."²⁰

If all difference consists in the mode of knowledge where does the devil or principle of evil come in: Williams answers that it doesn't. We can not account for this Fall by pointing to the fall of certain heavenly angels. And "the devil, even if he is a fact, has been an indulgence."²¹ Two things and two things only are premissed: God created this universe and it is good. Matter was not the evil root of creation. It was good and good like spirit. The Devil is a fiction. No trace of a devil responsible for evil or for the Fall is found in the Genesis narrative. Traditionally, when one rejects dualism, either the spirit-matter dualism, or the descending-spirit type of dualism common to emanationist theories, the possible explanations for the origin of evil are limited considerably. Man can be held responsible for the creation of evil, but this raises the problem of natural or cosmic evil, and the problem of how man could create what was not, since God is the absolute creator. God can be held responsible and evil can be explained as either illusion or that

20. Ibid., p. 21.

21. Ibid., p. 18.

which man must resist in order to grow in his beatitude - the good-coming-out-of-evil theory. Williams, in fact, accepted all of these theories and none of these theories. It is philosophically and logically impossible to do so, but Williams was neither a philosopher nor a logician. He was a poet and poets can be ambiguous about these matters if the ambiguity bears fruit. For Williams I think it did. It bore both literary and theological fruit. The section of my paper entitled "Hard Good, Hard God" attempts to show how this ambiguity bore fruit in his thought.

A curious undertone, never made explicit, in Williams's understanding of the Fall is the assumption that, had not fallen man been redeemed, had not God adjusted, so to speak, to this new relationship, man would have kept falling. The Fall set off a process of destruction which would have run itself into utter destruction. It was not a Fall from something to some other state just a little below paradise. He did not fall and land, but man fell and kept falling and would have kept falling until utter separation and destruction, until oblivion was reached.

In He Came Down From Heaven Williams describes the Fall as "precisely, to experience the opposite of good, that is the deprivation of the good, the slow destruction of

the good, and of themselves with the good."²² In one of his nativity plays, Seed of Adam, we find a similar idea. Adam has just announced to Eve that Mary and Joseph are to marry. Eve is incredulous: "Married! Mary? but why? and why Joseph?" Adam answers

Lest I should die. She shall be wedded
Lest our youngest born should be a prey
In her simplicity to her sisters and brothers.²³

The very fact that Adam and Eve are included in the nativity play gives weight to this interpretation. Mary is to marry so that Adam, so that mankind, shall not end in utter destruction. Man's most vicious assault on the co-inherence, his all out attack came in the crucifixion of Christ. Mankind did in fact crucify forgiveness, but this crucifixion, by the will of God, halted the falling. Williams speculated on what would have happened if God had not acted, if mankind had had its way and crucified, finally and 'for good,' the reconciliation.

The removal of reconciliation would have left us, quite simply, unreconciled, and that everywhere and not alone in religion. The present state of international anguish would have been universal, and that not only among nations. Every grudge and every resentment would have lasted; the dream of anything else would have been but a dream, and a less recurrent dream. The possibility of love would have depended upon the lack of offense; and no mortal lover but knows how easy offence is. The least rudeness would have rankled, and the very idea

22. Ibid., p. 20.

23. Williams, Seed of Adam, in Charles Williams: Selected Writings, pp. 76-77.

of anything else would have disappeared. We should have come to depend upon resentment; therefore upon hate; therefore on vengeance. This, which spreads fast enough even now, would then have spread with less and less difficulty and less and less delay. War, in the house and in the field, secret or open, malicious and continual, would have been our doom; there would, simply, have been no alternative. We could never have forgiven our children nor our children us; they would have been born into a world of malice, and their malice, had they survived, would have been directed against us. It is true they probably would not have survived; their parents would have loathed them too soon and too well; and, indeed, remove but that habit of reconciliation, and the begetting of children would soon have ceased. Sterile and stupid, the generation of men would have hastened into hell.²⁴

Man fell. The co-inherence was seen in a new light. It was seen and both loved and hated. It caused pain, it led to hell. God was not willing to cancel co-inherence simply because man apprehended it as painful, as terrible, as evil. But He was merciful to this extent: he ushered the fallen creatures out of Eden, and He let them die.

Only the death which the serpent had derided returns to them as mercy; they are not, at least, to live for ever; the awful possibility of Eden is removed. They are to be allowed to die.²⁵

Man was removed from Eden because he could not "have borne with sanity that place of restrained good, all of which could be known as unrestrained evil."²⁶

24. Williams, Forgiveness, pp. 154-155.

25. Williams, He Came Down, p. 22.

26. Williams, Beatrice, p. 48.

Having said that so well, so poetically, in another essay, Williams describes death as the result of the great breach between body and soul which came about at the Fall. Body and soul, indivisible, yet divided; they were unwilling to co-inhere. Death is "the great physical ratification" of this unwillingness to co-inhere.²⁷

The Old Testament does not end with the Fall. While the Fall is a constant state of being in both the Old and New Testaments, and in life, it is not the only state of being. The episode of the Fall deals with the relation of man and God. With the next generation our attention is turned toward the relations between man and man under God. Mankind finds itself at odds with itself. Men begin to find the experience of living with one another tiresome and horrible. Their relations with their neighbors bring anger and hatred and murder.²⁸ Nations develop, and man becomes capable of outrage not only individually but nationally.²⁹ Man is set against man, nation against nation. Mankind and creation with him becomes increasingly incoherent. Cities are ravaged, animals and people are killed. But then comes some new light. Into the incoherence the light of the co-inherence shines. The period of the covenants is the new thing shining into man's life. Some

27. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 127.

28. Williams, He Came Down, p. 23.

29. Ibid., p. 27.

order is introduced: "every man is to answer for the life of his brother," and God covenants to limit his power.³⁰ The coming of the prophets and their witness against the apostacy from the co-inherence, increases man's awareness that he sees the good as evil. Each new covenant and each new prophecy introduces a new principle, building up to the full principle of co-inherence.

The prophets proclaim the apostacy of Israel. They point out and point towards the sins against the poor, the ritual and ceremonial hypocrisy, the national outrages, and the idolatrous and evil imaginations of the people. They indict the people for their wickedness. They call men back to obedience to the laws, they remind the people of the covenant. But the prophets were not the only voices heard in Israel. There were the wise men, there were the Jobs and there were the preachers. Williams ends his formal discussion of the Old Testament with some perceptive remarks about Job and Ecclesiastes. He conceives of both books as compensations to the simple and straightforward call to repentance of the prophets. Both wise men suspected that the message of the prophets was perhaps oversimplified. Williams noted that, while Job's disputes with God "may be and indeed are epigrams

30. Ibid., p. 24.

of high intelligence," they are not, in fact, "noticeably patient."³¹ It is precisely because Job was not patient that his case is worth considering. Williams suggested that whoever wrote the last chapter of Job protected us from the rash proposal of Paul that man was not to question the Creator.³² That God did in fact reply to Job's impatient accusations is the important factor, not what God actually answered. This reveals to Williams that "A great curiosity ought to exist concerning divine things."³³ The moral of the story of Job is this: "Man was intended to argue with God."³⁴

If the moral of the book of Job is that man has not only a right but a duty to argue with God, Ecclesiastes presents that state of being which finds everything, even arguing with God to be not only useless but utterly monotonous. All things, from the gaining of wisdom to arguing with God turn out to be, in the end, thorough-going vanity. Man was intended to be bored. The superfluity of man's existence and his achievements overwhelm the Preacher. He submits to the cosmic irony and awaits his death, which, no doubt, will prove to be vanity also. Ecclesiastes represents "a state of being which discovers,

32. Ibid., p. 29-30.

33. Ibid., p. 30.

34. Ibid.

humanly speaking, the monotonous result of man's original choice."³⁵ In this sense, he "represents a state of mind for which the prophets, with their minds set on righteousness, have not allowed."³⁶ As it was then, it is now. Ecclesiastes represents a certain experience common to many men in every age. The experience of the Preacher is part of our experience. He "spoke of what he knew, and of what many millions of others have known after him."³⁷

Williams' insistence on the accuracy of the dogma that creation is nothing but the creation of the good, and his unwillingness to postulate a dualism to explain evil, and a certain fellow-feeling with Job and Ecclesiastes, led him to an interesting 'religious' frame of mind, which inspired a good deal of his literary and theological works. This frame of mind was caused and is characterized by the perception of, to use a valuable catch-phrase, the 'hard good.'

35. Ibid., p. 42.

36. Ibid., p. 30.

37. Ibid., p. 45.

CHAPTER III

Bacchus is a play about hard goodness (la bonte duré) which I oppose to soft goodness (la bonte molle)...(a play concerned) to give back to God the intelligence that is paid into the Devil's account and which was paid to him especially in the sixteenth century when the Devil played the leading part. 1

HARD GOOD, HARD GOD

Ever since Kierkegaard's extensive examination of paradox and his insistence that Christianity is a paradoxical religion, and, as a consequence, his call for for the crucifixion of the intellect, the paradoxical and paradox have become commonplace in the prose of theology. Paradox, for some theologians, is merely the way the West refers to what the East has alswys insisted on calling 'mystery.' For other theologians, paradox has become a catch-all category signifying nothing but the failure of reason. Quite often, however, the use of the word paradox exposes in the theologian a delicate sense of incredulity about the Divine etiquette.

1. Jean Cocteau, quoted by Amos Wilder, Theology and Modern Literature, Harvard Univ. Press, 1958, p. 36.

What the theologian means to say, what he says in his heart is, "I should not have done it this way had I been in charge or had I at least served on the committee which was in charge of Creation." Secretly, his objections usually amount to "I should not have been as harsh as this God," or "And we call Him good?" One way or another, to most men, God seems at times to be a most unreasonable Being (at best) or an omnipotent monster (at worst). But since Kierkegaard, we say 'paradox' and leave it at that and retire with that pleasant assurance of having conceded nothing and of, simultaneously, having avoided blasphemy.

And again, while most thinkers agree that paradox is a useful, although a questionable category, there is little agreement among theologians about when the paradox occurs. A paradox embraced too soon often proves to be, if not completely unfaithful, at least a fickle lover.

Furthermore, while Kierkegaard attempted to make paradox an existential and not merely a logical category, it is not always so perceived. That is, it is generally easier to say paradox than to live a paradox or in a paradoxical creation. To use an absurd analogy, it is easier to say that the Charles River is cold in mid-January than it is to swim in the Charles in mid-January (ice or not.) Too often the vocation of the theologian has

been merely to remark that the Charles is cold in mid-January.

It was Charles Williams's opinion that we tend to embrace the paradox of evil too soon. Williams demanded accuracy. He asked that we strain our eyes, that we look further into what we call evil. In his own life and work, this accuracy amounted to what some might wish to call blasphemy, or perhaps heresy. At any rate, it is out of the ordinary, and therefore interesting. Williams looked at life and saw everywhere what amounted to a contradiction within the good itself. Williams, or at least one-half of him, would have subscribed to Hobbes's adjectives concerning life. Our existence is unquestionably many times almost unbearable. And "our suffering

'is permanent, obscure, and dark
and hath the nature of infinity.'"2

He pushed the paradox involved in the problem of evil to the limit. He had what might be called a poetic-theological obsession with the problem of evil. If evil was ultimately a delusion for Williams, it was never an illusion.

A new dark side has been discovered within the romantic tradition in literature which might help explain

2. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 190.

the appearance of this dark side in Williams , who was avowedly a romantic. Even Swinburne is now seen as having been acquainted with a soiled universe. This dark side in Romanticism "may be regarded as the first state of the romantic mind."³ Part of the Romantic movement was characterized by "realistic works which portrayed bitterly with evils of the times."⁴ But this dark side was apparent in Williams to the end. Two characters in Williams's novel, War In Heaven frequently argued about another possibility: "whether pessimism was always the result of a too romantic, even a slightly sentimental, view of the worlds."⁵

Where ever the solution lies, theologically and literarily, Williams had a special brand of the Romantic vision. A similar vision would perhaps have arisen had Job and Ecclesiastes turned romantic. Williams's romanticism was a chastened romanticism. It was a restrained, moody, almost pessimistic romanticism, hammered out between the acceptance of the creation as good and the sense of an evil and demonic element in this good itself. Williams suffered at times from a cosmic dyspepsia. There is, in parts of his thedology and in most of his novels, a sense

3. Anthology of Romanticism , selected and edited by Ernest Bernbaum, the Ronald Press Co., 1948, 3rd ed., p. xxvii.

4. Ibid.

5. Williams, War In Heaven. Faber & Faber, 1957, p. 19. Hereafter cited as War.

of destruction always hovering around man and all that he is doing. There is in them a sense that any minute the center will completely fail and man will be spun into outer darkness where there will be even more weeping and gnashing of teeth; a sense that the horrible universals, that unrestrained power will be loosed in the world⁶; that the whole creation is bristling with forces and powers which, the balance having been disturbed, will unleash hideous calamities. No doubt part of the inspiration for his novels came from meditating, as Lionel Rackstraw does in War In Heaven, on "what mightn't be true, in this terrifying and obscene universe."⁷

Williams set about to argue with God in his drama, novels, poetry and theology. He argued persistently and openly. There were many problems with existence, but the greatest was its "unfairness", and unfairness to an Englishman is a very serious thing. This unfairness was rooted in two facts: co-inherence and God as First Cause.

Creation imaged the life of the Trinity. Everything and everyone was created to co-inhere. This was the way things were intended to operate, the way creation was. That everyone was bound together into this co-inherent

6. They do and it is in The Place of the Lion.

7. Williams, War, p. 19.

relationship was, because of the Fall, no longer felt to be pleasant. We fell, we therefore saw differently, but the structure of the co-inherence remained. But then what is so unfair about this co-inherence? It is precisely that others exist and we are not, so to speak, the masters of our fate. Had we been created, off in a corner somewhere, with only our decisions to make for ourselves, and having no decisions for us or decisions which involve us being made by others, then this evil situation would not exist. As it is now, "we can not live, even physically, without taking life. We cannot choose between two alternatives, both of which contain good, without destroying one of them. We cannot act, in any important matter without committing outrage."⁸

It is not only the evil will which creates evil in this world, but the good will also. A scientist in New York can, by intending only the good, kill, cripple, or maim thousands in Germany. In an age when communications and travel intensify interchange among peoples, the evils of co-inherence become even more obvious. The Second World War provided an occasion for Williams to meditate on the unfairness of co-inherence. "In religion then we are all one union in sin. The murders in Poland are, in

8. Shideler, op. cit., p. 169.

that sense, our sin."⁹ And again,

...we are not at war directly because of our own wish, but because of others. We depend upon others. The old cry against governments involving their peoples in war may be inapplicable in this war or not. It was sincere, but (as we now see) useless. We are always in the condition that we are because of others. ¹⁰

Williams, in one sense at least, would have agreed with Sartre: "There's no need for red-hot poker. Hell is - other people."¹¹ The existence of the other has always been a problem, and has recently become a philosophical problem. A caricature of Lord Berkely's philosophy solves it in one way,¹² and generally Western civilization has solved it in another. The great doctrine of toleration, that reluctant admission that others exist, has been a general acknowledgement of empirical data but in no sense a real solution. Tolerance, to Williams, betrays a certain resentment toward others. We resent that we are so dependent on others.

Yet until we are willing to accept the mere fact without resentment we can hardly be said to admit that other people exist. We may reject, we may rebuke, we may contend against their action. But the very first condition of admitting that their existence is as real as our own is to allow that they have, as individuals, as much right to act in the way that they decide as we have. They may be wicked and we good or

10. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 122.

11. Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit in No Exit and Three Other Plays, Vintage Book, 1955, p. 47.

12. Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the only one? (of all).

vice versa; that is a question of moral judgment, and therefore another question. The main fact is that we are compelled to admit their decision, and to admit that our lives, and often our deaths, depend on that. ¹³

We should, having admitted the existence of others, not be too quick to judge them moral or immoral. This is an obscene universe. Things happen, terrible things happen even in our search for the good. This is a universe in which "the very pursuit of goodness becomes a hunt,"¹⁴ a world in which "that which was to be our Lord becomes a victim."¹⁵ We moralize too much. We read the Gospels, we find good and bad people, we judge and we are mostly wrong. Williams suspects that

...Caiaphas and Pilate were each of them doing his best in the duty presented to them. The high priest was condemning a blasphemer. The Roman Governor was attempting to maintain the peace....They chose the least imperfect good that they could see. And their choice crucified the Good. ¹⁶

This is the way the world is. We are caught in a web of destruction. This web of destruction is not only our common apprehension of existence. It is found in the Gospels themselves. No doubt existence itself creates some doubt in our minds about the Gospel, but writes Williams, "It is in the Gospels that the really terrify-

13. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 123.

14. Ibid., p. 96.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

ing attacks on the Gospel lie."¹⁷ The two attacks on the Gospel within the Gospels to which Williams most often refers are Christ's pronouncement about Judas - that it would have been better for him had he not been born - and the legend of the Holy Innocents. Williams thinks Christ's comment about Judas incredible. "And who", he writes, "caused him to be born? Who maintained his life up to and in that awful less than good?"¹⁸ It was God who created and sustained Judas, and it was God who said that "it were good for that man if he had not been born" - and where is Justice? And where, too, is the justice in the story of the Holy Innocents. Did they deserve death? Were they offending the good? They were innocent. The legend illustrates the obscenity of the universe, and the horrible contradiction which always confronts us within the good itself. For Williams "there (was) no more significant or more terrible tale in the New Testament than that which surrounded the young incarnacy with the dying Innocents: the chastisement of His peace was upon them. At the end He paid back the debt - to God if not to them; He too perished innocently; with Him also (morally) there was nothing else to be done."¹⁹ Christ came, and

17. Ibid., p. 102.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., pp. 96-97.

he came into the co-inherence. He was born into time and was therefore a part to the evils of the time. His life in the co-inherence meant the death of the innocents, the sin of Judas, and of Pilate, and Caiaphas. The Word came and so too destruction. Christ could not escape the contradiction in the good that we all experience.

The root of the unfairness of existence lies in the 'omipotence' or 'first causeness' of God. This theme is pronounced clearly in most of Williams works. First, unfairness lies in the introduction of contradiction into the good.

The unfairness of existence is precisely in this - unless indeed we shared in the Fall and were ourselves personally responsible for the first sin. Even Christ's own mysterious submission to injustice on our behalf does not seem quite to do away with the injustice; we did not ask to be tempted; we do not want, in that sense, to sin. He wishes us to be tempted? Very well, but then do not let him blame us. 20

But that is not the only unfairness. Even if we did Fall, and are all responsible, the unfairness is not eliminated. Even if free will were requisite to enjoying the creation as it should be enjoyed, and even if it were necessary in order that we might be in a proper relationship with the Creator, the unfairness remains. The creation, the joy, the free will are all credible and apparently necessary.

20. Williams, Beatrice, p. 148.

What is incredible to Williams and manifestly nor necessary is that

a finite choice ought to result in a infinite distress; or rather let it be said that, though credible, it is not tolerable (to us) that the Creator should deliberately maintain and sustain His created universe in a state of infinite distress as a result of the choice. No doubt it is possible to Him.²¹

The most remarkable statement of this unfairness is in He Came Down From Heaven, and here it is not presented in the form of an indictment, but merely as an explanation of who God is: God is

...responsible for all; responsible in this sense - that knowing with a clarity inconceivable to man everything that would happen in his creation he yet ordained the creation. No amount of pious exposition of the free will of man can avoid that fact. There is no split second of the unutterable horror and misery of the world that he did not foresee (to use the uselessness of that language) when he created; no torment of children, no obstinacy of social wickedness, no starvation of the innocent, no prolonged and deliberate cruelty, which he did not know. It is impossible for the mind of man to contemplate an infinitesimal fraction of the persistent cruelty of mankind, and beyond mankind of the animals, through innumerable years, and yet remain sane.... The Omnipotence contemplated that pain and created; that is, he brought its possibility - and its actuality - into existence. Without him it could not have been; and calling it his permission instead of his will may be intellectually accurate, but does not seem to get over the fact that if the First Cause has power, intelligence, and will to cause a universe to exist, then he is the First Cause

21. Williams, Selected Writings, pp. 94-95.

of it. The First Cause cannot escape being the First Cause. All the metaphors about fathers giving their children opportunities to be themselves fail, as all metaphors fail. Fathers are not the First Cause. God only is God. The pious have been - as they always are - too anxious to excuse him; the prophet was wiser: "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. 22

Williams did not always simply explain; quite often he indicted God for the injustices of existence. The explanation just quoted contains the whole logic of his indictment. God is the First Cause. He is, absolutely, the Creator. God is omniscient. He knows what it is he creates. He is the sustainer - and he sustains us in our distress. God is "fundamentally responsible for the existence of all injustice," and as absolute Creator and sustainer "he sustains therefore in hell."²³ Williams felt that the merciful act would have been to cancel out creation when contradiction arose within the good itself; at least he suspected that this was the human judgement on the matter. Although it was we who chose to see contradiction within the good, it was God who, to this extent, ratified our decision, by sustaining us in our choice. "He could have willed us not to be after the Fall. He did not."²⁴

22. Williams, He Came Down, pp. 98-99.

23. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 129.

24. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 95.

In Shadows of Ecstasy, his first novel, ^{24a} Williams has the priest, Ian Caithness tentatively think through this problem of contradiction. "The most difficult texts for him to explain away," thought Caithness, (and here we can suppose Caithness is doing Williams's thinking for him or vice versa), "had always been those which obscurely hint at the origin of evil itself in the Unnameable."²⁵ The texts Caithness and Williams had in mind were the lying spirit sent by God to Zedekiah and the question of Isaiah, "Shall there be evil in the city and I the Lord have not done it?"²⁶ Caithness does not let his mind embrace a dualism, but when he does not, he is even further perplexed. Then he attempts to dismiss the problem as a mystery. He concludes that a much safer line of thought than proposing a mystery "was to insist that good and evil were facts, whatever the explanation was."²⁷ Williams too insisted on the real existence of evil, and he followed the clues which obscurely hint at the origin of evil in the Unnameable. Accepting both the real existence of evil, and the hint of its origin, he concluded that it was nothing but good sense, nothing but the proper response to the data revealed, to feel nauseous about creation and

24a. Although Shadows of Ecstasy was the first novel to be written, it was the fifth to be published.

25. Williams, Shadows, p. 227.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

existence. Both the distaste we feel for creation and the regret we feel that God allows it to continue are proper and just responses.²⁸ This meant also to him that, contrary to widespread opinion, the Christian is not by the nature of his faith, required to be optimistic.²⁹

So far, Williams's exploration of the paradox of evil, his refusal to embrace the paradox too soon, and his arguments with God, are, if unusually put, at least not shockingly unusual. Theologians and poets have traditionally been interested in either justifying man's ways to God or justifying God's ways to man. Both justifications interested Williams but he chose to emphasize the latter. He not only emphasized, he worked out a modest doctrine of the Justification of Creation. In this doctrine it is not primarily God's creatures but the act and the sustaining of creation which needs justifying. It is the creation "that 'needs' (let the word be permitted) justifying."³⁰ In one sense, the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ justify, not man to God, but God to man and creation to man. That the Son of the God whose creation needs justifying was not well-received is no surprise or incredible

28. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 99.

29. Ibid., p. 98.

30. Ibid., p. 95.

blasphemy to Williams. King Herod was a Bad King? Yes.

But he knew what he was about. Herod

...was a wiser King
 Than all the Eastern Lords;
 They brought incense, gold and myrrh,
 He send swords. 31

And what about those who, in pursuit of the good, not only private good but public good, crucified Christ? Answer: "They crucified Him; let it be said, they did well."³² Christ was crucified by the best intentions the old world knew: the intentions of public good and religious purity. This was the justice of the world. This was the justice of the creation. It was a justice to which all men had to submit to live in this creation. This justice was also part of the unfairness of creation, and it was this unfairness to which Christ submitted. In the act of creation and consequently in the sustaining of this creation, God submitted us to his inexorable will. In the crucifixion, on the other hand,

...He submitted Himself to our wills (and therefore to His). He made us; He maintained us in our pain. At least, however, on the Christian showing, He consented to be Himself subject to it. If, obscurely, He would not cease to preserve us in the full horror of existence, at least He shared it. He became as helpless as we under the will

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31. Williams, Poems of Conformity, Oxford Univ. Press, 1917, 'The Epiphany'.
 32. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 99.

which is He. This is the first approach to a sense of justice in the whole situation....³³ He deigned to endure the justice He decreed.

The coming of Christ was then a divine admission of responsibility for the creation and for the preservation of the world and its creatures. He submitted Himself to the justice of the world. In so submitting Christ became, for Williams, the middle term, or common term.³⁴ in the argument for the justification. Williams referred to the Incarnate one as the common term between man and God, which allows for proportion and consequently, justice.

A dubious principle of justice lies at the heart of Williams's doctrine of the justification of creation. The principle is expressed adequately in the phrase 'turn-about's fair play.' The principle is difficult enough to accept for justice between men; it becomes almost impossible to accept as a principle of justice between man and God. Even if it turned out (horrible irony) that 'turn-about' was in fact the divine principle of justice, it would not be very satisfactory to us creatures; and from all evidence in the New Testament it was precisely this principle of turn-about that Christ came, in part, to end and not to sanctify.

Our distress and our horror do not leave us because

33. Ibid., pp. 95-96.

34. Williams, 'Dr. Joad and Sin', review, quoted by Shideler, op. cit., p. 66.

God came down from heaven and submitted to the ultimate distress and ultimate horror of existence. On the contrary. That he too submitted himself to the full horrors of existence is more likely to drive us to further despair. To a poet perhaps this would bring consolation. The restoration of a macabre justice however was not all Williams saw in the cross. The problem of evil is a paradox, and if paradoxes have two or more sides it can be said that Williams bounced back and forth between or among the sides in a gracefully obscure way. His essay, "The Cross" in which he speaks of the justification of creation contains more insights into the person and work of Christ. I shall discuss these later.

Williams's attempt to give back to God the intelligence usually attributed to the devil, his insight into the hard justice and goodness, while movingly presented in his theological prose, becomes, perhaps more clear and credible in his novels, poetry and drama. It is most clearly presented in his plays.

The 'Figura Rerum' or 'The Back Of Christ'

Williams 'resolved' the problem of evil in his own mind by conceiving of what he referred to as "the terrible Good." By 'resolved', I do not mean that he exhausted the mystery of the paradox of evil, but that he brought evil,

in his own mind, into some satisfactory relationship to the Divine will and purpose without positing a dualism.

His solution was to combine in one person or figure good and evil, or combine in one character, simultaneously, Christ and the devil. In his drama we are presented with the paradox of evil incarnate. This incarnation was at once the intensification of the paradox, and to Williams, when properly understood, its solution. In an early play, The Rite of the Passion there is only a hint of this. The Lord asks Satan what he is. Satan replies, "I am thy shadow only known as hell where any linger from thy sweet repose."³⁵ In itself the line is unextraordinary, but seen in the light of his later work it can be understood as a point in the development of his resolution of the paradox. In Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury and Seed of Adam, both written in 1936, the paradox becomes more fully incarnate. If Satan was Christ's shadow in The Rite of the Passion, in Cranmer Christ and Satan are both represented by a single figure - the 'skeleton.' They are, in fact, one. I shall let the skeleton speak for himself. Even out of context his identity can be gathered. Speaking to the audience, the skeleton explains:

35. Williams, Three Plays: The Witch, The Chaste Wanton, The Rite of the Passion, Oxford Univ. 1931, p..190.

Yet, O my people - can you
 believe it?
 blessed and chosen are they who receive it -
 there is a way; I am the way,
 I the division, the derision, where
 the bones dance in the darkening air,
 I at the cross-ways the voice of the one way,
 crying from the tomb of the earth where I died
 the word of the only right suicide,
 the only word no words can quell
 the way to heaven and the way to hell.

I am the way, the way to heaven;
 who will show a poor blind beggar the way to heaven?
 I am the way, the way to hell,
 who will teach a poor blind beggar the way to hell?³⁶

The references to the way, the proliferation of
 images suggested by cross-ways, the tomb, the only right
 suicide are all unmistakable allusions to Christ who is
 the way to heaven and the way to hell. And not only is
 he the way to heaven and the way to hell; he is perceived
 ("all difference lies in the mode of knowledge³⁷") by man-
 kind as either the Lord of heaven or the Lord of hell.

Cranmer confronts the skeleton and asks him who
 he is. The skeleton replies,

Anything, everything;
 fellow, friend, cheat, traitor.
 I was born under Virgo, of an outlandish house,
 to keep account of such vows as there are written.
 My name, after today's fashion, is latinized
 into Figura Rerum. Anne prized me at first;
 later she found my bones and called me a cheat.
 King Henry found me a servant, and then a traitor.
 I am the delator of all things to their truth. ³⁷

36. Williams, Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, Oxford
 Univ. Press, 1936, pp. 18-19.

37. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

Further on, the skeleton calls himself "...the Judas who betrays man to God,"³⁸ and he says to Cranmer, "...You shall see Christ, // see his back first - I am his back."³⁹ Cranmer's next question is really the solution to the problem of the unfairness of existence: "Can life itself be redemption? all grace but grace? // all this terror the agonizing glory of grace?"⁴⁰ The skeleton answers Cranmer:

I am Christ's back; I without face or breath,
life in death, death in life,
each a strife with, each a socket for, each
in the twisted rear of goodwill, backward running speech,
the derision that issues from doctrines of grace
through the division man makes between him and his
place. ⁴¹

This division, then, that man makes between 'him and his place' causes the 'derision that issues from doctrines of grace.' Our divisions make grace derision.

In Seed of Adam, hell, or the mistress of hell, a servant of the third king, called Myrrh ('a negress'), rather than being incarnate with the good becomes, at the end of the play, the midwife of the incarnation. Up to the conclusion of the play, Myrrh has been fighting with Mary; but the fighting ends after Mary announces somewhat

38. Ibid., p. 47.

39. Ibid., p. 69.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 70.

stuffily; "Parturition is upon me,"⁴² (one of Williams's worst lines!) It is the birth of the Incarnate One which transform's Myrrh from 'the worm in the core of the apple of the Fall'⁴³ to the midwife of the Incarnation.

This same motif was to be in his re-mythologization of the Arthurian legends. In a note he refers to Garlon, the Invisible Knight, "who is Satan to us but the Holy Ghost to the supernatural powers."⁴⁴ The Invisible Knight was to have been his most developed incarnation of the paradox of evil, or of good, and the whole complex of images and ideas incorporated into this character should have been, according to Mrs. Ridler, "the most powerful of all the unifying symbols we have been discussing."⁴⁵ Williams death prevented the further development of this image.

Descent Into Hell, written shortly after Cranmer and Seed of Adam, attempts to convey the sense of the hard, or as Williams preferred, the terrible or dreadful, good. The attempt in the novel is not nearly so successful as it is in Cranmer. We can perhaps identify with the suicide in chapter two - can identify with one whose life "seemed to him an endless gutter down which ran and end-

42. Williams, Seed of Adam, in Selected Writings, p. 89.

43. Ibid., p. 86.

44. Quoted by Ridler, op. cit., p. xxxvi, underlining reproduces Mrs. Ridler's italics.

45. Ibid.

less voice"⁴⁶ - but we cannot identify so easily with the heroine, whose terrible plight was to meet her 'doppelgänger' on various occasions. But the message is there: "Good. It contains terror, not terror good."⁴⁷ Salvation itself "is quite often a terrible thing - a frightening good."⁴⁸

If we are to give back to God the intelligence usually paid to the devil's account, then we must be willing to acknowledge the terror in good itself. By assigning the awful events of existence to the work of the devil, we rob God of his power. Likewise we are unable to understand the things that are from God. Love, for instance. When we read or hear that 'God is love' we generally suppose that it "means that God is like our immediate emotional indulgence, and not that our meaning of love ought to have something of the 'otherness' and terror of God."⁴⁹

Giving back to God the intelligence usually paid to the devil is, however, only the first step in the resolution of the paradox. Then we must admit that God is not so great a friend as we often choose to believe. He is alien as "Heaven is alien; we must be naturalized

46. Williams, Descent Into Hell. Faber & Faber, 1955, hereafter cited as Hell.

47. Ibid., p. 65.

48. Ibid., p. 59.

49. Williams, He Came Down, p. 15.

or die."⁵⁰ Honesty and accuracy, not piety are the approaches to the alien God and his alien heaven. King Herod's response to the coming down of God was honest, if not accurate. Christ came down to betray men to God. He is our Judas. No one wishes to be betrayed and especially to an alien God, a dreadful good. Christ came bringing death in life and life in death. A hymn refrain Williams quoted illustrates the quiet horror of our response to the coming of Christ.

Jesus Christ is our redeemer
And we wish to God he weren't.⁵¹

Our betrayer has come. Our betrayal is at hand. We try to bargain. If we find he will not bargain we try to make him a good friend. We make Christ flabby and God a cosmic chum. Like Anne Boleyn, we sometimes find his bones and call him a cheat. He is, in fact, a cheat. He has come promising life and demanding death.

At the Fall we lost our ability to perceive the good. The greater the good which comes to us the greater the evil appears to us. We, seeing and knowing in a different mode, see the powers of heaven as demonic forces. We see the back of Christ first; and we experience the derision that issues from doctrines of grace. Only,

50. Quoted by Ridler, op. cit., pp. xxix-xxx.

51. Williams, He Came Down, p. 95.

however, when we have seen the back of Christ - seen him as our Judas - and only when we have experienced the derision that issues from the doctrines of grace, can we see that it is our divisions, our separations which make us wish that our redeemer had not come and caused the derisions of grace. If we have not found the terror in the good, the bones in Christ, we have not found either good or Christ.

CHAPTER IV

HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN: CO-INHERENCE REDEEMED

Charles Williams was primarily interested in images, types, symbols, figures, patterns and states of being. The life of an historical man is not noticeably composed of images, types, symbols, figures, patterns or states of being, but rather of acts, attitudes, feelings and so forth. Therefore, when Williams discusses the person and work of Christ, he shows little or no interest in the historical Jesus or the man Jesus. To him Christ was a walking pattern, a significant cosmic symbol, an image of the structure of reality, and the source and supreme figure of a new state of being. Christ was a principle, almost an impersonal being, a 'divine thing.' True enough, Williams described certain events in the life of this divine thing, but only to reveal a pattern or recommend a principle. Perhaps his most eloquent description of the man Jesus, of the Jesus of history is that the Divine Being "was in the form of a man, a peripatetic teacher, a thaumaturgical orator."¹ Nor was

1. Williams, Dove, p. 2.

he particularly interested in the ethics of Jesus, or in his Messianic consciousness. In this sense, Williams's romanticism led him to almost opposite concerns from those continental romantics and idealists who poured forth so many lives of Jesus. The continental romantics were interested in the romance of the man; Williams, in the metaphysics of romance.

Williams's understanding of Christ most resembles that found in the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel's ontological understanding of the Incarnation, its presentation of a cosmic Christ, and of lesser importance, its conception of all things in Christ, were all taken over by Williams and, if anything, raised to a higher metaphysical pitch. The Gospel of John rather than the synoptics seemed to Williams to allegorize where allegory was necessary and to demonstrate that the acts of the Messiah were both historic and contemporary.²

Christ "himself exhibited the facts of existence,"³ and the crucial fact which he exhibited was the principle of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is one of the great philosophical moments of world history for Williams. His proliferation of images from this basic image or principle is complex. The Incarnation revealed to him that the

2. Williams, He Came Down, p. 101.

3. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 149.

Creator was accepting responsibility for his creation by submitting himself to the will of his creatures and their choice at the Fall. The Incarnation establishes a principle of justice, and from there of love and finally of union. Secondly, the Incarnation re-affirms that reality is sacramental, that is, co-inherent. From this principle derives Williams's thoughts about matter and more specially the body and the Way of the Affirmation of Images, and finally the way of romantic love. The Incarnation is, for Williams, the key principle and image of existence.

The Incarnation reveals and is a type of the justice between man and God. Before the Fall there was no justice as such between man and God. Justice was not necessary. The only justice then was the goodness and co-inherence of creation. In the Fall man came to see this justice as radical injustice. Because of the Fall, a new justice was needed, but of course not deserved. Man cried out against the Creator; the Creator responded. God's response to Job indicated to Williams that God had heard man's cries for justice and had chosen to answer them. The covenants in the Old Testament gradually reveal God's response. All the covenants point to a single act. God has chosen to limit his power and to act as if his superfluous creatures were necessary. There was one and only one reason for God's response: his steadfast love.

The Incarnation fully reveals this self-limitation of God. This act makes Christianity unique among the religions. God could have chosen other ways to accept responsibility for his creation. He could have infused grace into all men and all creation. He did not. He became what they were, what he had made. He did not draw all men up to Him but rather He came down from heaven. It is this divine down-coming which is so significant, and which in turn makes everything new.

He came down from heaven and he came in a special manner. God came united with man. This union, it has always been held, was no freak, no artificial union, no expediency. It was a genuine co-inherence. The Trinity chose to reveal itself in a certain way, a way which "precisely involved creatures to experience joy. He determined to be incarnate by being born; ~~that~~ is he determined to have a mother."⁴

The pattern of the Incarnation then is that He came down from heaven and that He came down as a man, and that he humbled himself to be born of a woman - of a human woman who herself had been born of human parents. This last part of the pattern fascinated Williams. The woman, Mary, was for Williams nothing more and nothing less than

4. Ibid., p. 120.

'theotokos'. It was unbelievable, but it was true. It was impossible. It was, in fact, a scandal. That it is by its very nature incredible and scandalous is, in part, demonstrated by the great human efforts to cover it up, exemplified by the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary. The God Incarnate chose to participate in the joys of creation: the joys of birth, the joys of being in the flesh, and all that is associated with being a man.

The humility of the Trinity exhibited in the Incarnation is more, simply, than the Incarnate One's down-coming, and more than his acceptance of existence as a man. That Christ was born of a human mother meant for Williams that the Trinity "gave us the final privilege of owing everything to ourselves as well as to Him."⁵ Christ was doubly derived: from God and from mankind. Christ's double derivation reveals the true nature of life in the co-inherence. Christ came co-inhering with man. This co-inherence reveals the requirements for true life in the co-inherence. Life is to be vicarious. God did not come alone, so to speak. He came in and through a man. He did not snatch men up, but humbled himself down. He chose power not force. He came 'in man' and man came

5. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 77.

'in God.' Mrs. Shideler captures the implications of this double derivation in Williams thought:

Thus Christ, having his source in both God and the creation, exhibits the fullness of reciprocal derivation. We are derived from him, but also he is derived from us. God had made man in his image; by the Incarnation man made God in his image, not in anthropomorphic conjectures but in unambiguous physical flesh; ⁶

The time of the Incarnation was a problem for Williams. It had come within history, into a world already created in the image of the Trinity. The problem was this: it was either something new or it was not. If it was something new then it displayed a pattern of something which did not exist before. If this pattern did not exist before, then mankind could not have renounced this pattern, this mode of existence. But the world was created in perfection. Williams could not account for the novelty. In reality his problem was Platonic; his solution was Johannine, or at least its roots lay in the Fourth Gospel.

His solution was to propose either the eternal intention of the Incarnation or the eternal existence of the Incarnation. Mrs. Ridler suggests that he chose for his solution the eternal intention of the Incarnation: that "Christ would have become incarnate, even if there had been no Fall, for 'In His union and conjunction with

6. Shideler, op. cit., p. 77.

body, God finds His final perfection and felicity."⁷

It should be noted that the sentence Mrs. Ridler quotes is from Coventry Patmore and not from Williams. Williams was more ambiguous about this doctrine than Mrs. Ridler. He could not, it seems, make up his mind. In one place he spoke as if he only considered the Incarnation as eternally a divine intention, but in other places, he spoke of it as eternally a divine fact. On page 134 of The Forgiveness of Sins he writes:

All that we take for granted is that the Trinity had determined the Incarnation of the Word, that They had determined and caused the creation of superfluous mankind with a purpose of entire joy...⁸

Here we see the intention, or determination, of Incarnation and then the creation of 'superfluous mankind.' However, on page 129 of the same essay he writes:

He (man) was the only rational creature so made, and his flesh was in unique relationship to the sublime flesh which was the unity of God with matter. The Incarnation was the single dominating fact, and to that all flesh was related.⁹

On page 130 he becomes more bold. The Platonism of this passage is remarkable.

The Incarnation was the Original from which the lesser living human images derived. It was to be, if it was not already, intimately connected with their flesh; for it was to derive--since

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- 7. Ridler, op. cit., p. xxxviii.
 - 8. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 134.
 - 9. Ibid., p. 129.

he had so decreed--from their flesh; if indeed it did not already in their simultaneity so derive. He had determined to be born of a mother, and that she also should be born of hers; and that physical relations of blood should unite him with all men and women that were or were to be. The Fall therefore took place in a nature which was as close as that to his own incarnate Nature.

10

And again on page 144 he writes that the Incarnation "had been intended from the beginning,"¹¹ and in an essay entitled "Natural Goodness" he writes that "This decree upon Himself (to incarnate) was the decree that brought mankind into being."¹²

This understanding of the Incarnation presumably rests on formulations of Duns Scotus, or at least a tradition represented by him. This position maintains that the Incarnation would have come about even if there had been no Fall.¹³ For Williams, however, it wasn't a question of determining whether the Incarnation would have occurred had there been no Fall, but of moving the principle of the Incarnation back to creation itself, so that the structure of reality exhibited by the Incarnation could be postulated for the creation also. In so moving

10. Ibid., p. 130.

11. Ibid., p. 144.

12. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 76.

13. It does not seem necessary to trace Williams's idea back to Scotus. I am told that he would have had to look no further than to his contemporary, William Temple, to find such a doctrine.

the Incarnation back before creation he could work out an anthropology in the light of our existence as lesser living human images derived from the one Original.

The Incarnation then is this for Williams: (1) The further definition and image of co-inherence--it reveals the unity of God and man in Christ which is the potential of all men; (2) It is the common term for any sort of justice between man and God; (3) It reveals the humility necessary for life in the co-inherence; and it, by virtue of the double derivation, reveals the vicariousness of life which is another principle of co-inherence and forms the theological rationale for the life of substitution; (4) It further revealed or was the first validating principle of the structure of existence as symbolic or sacramental--this being, according to Williams, the principle enshrined in that phrase of the Athanasian creed, "not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God." (5) It, by specifically being an incarnation, stamped the body as being of special importance in the salvation of mankind. Furthermore, that we all are 'mutatis mutandis', incarnate beings ourselves, having our derivation from this One, places a great significance on our bodies as bodies. It is "by virtue of the Incarnation" that "Eros and Agape are no longer divided."¹⁴

14. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 161.

And finally, "It is a result of the Incarnation that opened all potentialities of the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven in and through matter."¹⁵

The Forgiveness of Sins, the companion essay of He Came Down From Heaven, deals mostly with the atonement and redemption and the working of redemption in the world. As with the Incarnation, Williams's interest in the Atonement is with patterns and images and states of being, although his conception of the Atonement is perhaps more dynamic. He is more interested in what it did than how it works. The Atonement is an 'operation.' Its operation is essentially beyond our comprehension, but not our attention.¹⁶ It is an operation which introduces into our lives the possibility of overcoming the results of the Fall and our own personal contributions to the kingdom of evil. The Fall, we remember, was an alteration in the mode of knowledge. Man knew only what was to be known before the Fall--the good. The alteration is from the knowledge of good to the knowledge of good as evil. If the Fall and therefore all sin is an alteration of knowledge, then the corrective, the atonement or redemption, must somehow alter the alteration in our knowledge. And this it did, according to Williams. Redemption renews the possibility

15. Williams, He Came Down, p. 74.

16. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 183.

of knowing all things as good.

A new knowledge is introduced into the creation.
Before,

men had determined to know good as evil; there could be but one perfect remedy for that--to know the evil of the past itself as good, and to be free from the necessity of the knowledge of evil in the future; to find right knowledge and perfect freedom together; to know all things as occasions to love. ¹⁷

All things are to be known not merely as occasions of love, but as occasions of 'heavenly love.'¹⁸ By all things, Williams meant all things. Nothing is to be forgotten. Nothing is to be obliterated. The creation is a creation of love; the Incarnation is the coming down of love; everything that is, is an occasion of love. Therefore, "all things can be known as good, however evil, for they can be known as occasions of love."¹⁹ Williams doesn't deny that evil will continue to exist. It will. But the knowledge of it will be new. Evil will no longer be known as evil but as pardoned, as forgiven. Williams seems to be ambiguous here. Does he mean that no evil exists, but that the evil we see, because of the Fall, shall be known, however evil it appears to us, as good? This seems to be close to his reasoning, yet

17. Williams, He Came Down, p. 58.

18. Ibid., p. 59.

19. Ibid., p. 98.

too simple. The ambiguity must stand, it seems. Even hell itself is to be made by the atonement, a part of the final glory.²⁰

Williams's description of the operation of the atonement is quite poetic. A summary of the operation, using his imagery would read something like this: Christ came down and lived as a man. He suffered the worst fate of man; it was a sad and obscene fate. This fate was not simply crucifixion; it was somehow the experience of the utter deprivation of good. This fate was properly Adam's fate in that Adam chose to know contradiction within the good. Christ, substituting himself for Adam, for all men, experienced the utter depths of the Fall. Christ underwent this experience of utter deprivation of good at the contrivance of man. The Good came and man crucified it. The crucifixion of the Good was man's loss although he did not recognize it as he never, after the Fall, had recognized his good. Even in the act of crucifying the Good, God maintained his creatures; He maintained them out of love. Christ absorbed the evil will of man and gave them his love. "He so forgave that he exchanged his love for man's loss; he received the loss and gave the love."²¹ This receiving of the loss and the

20. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 183.

21. Ibid., p. 156.

giving of the love is nothing else than forgiveness.

The crucifixion-resurrection event is the diagram of forgiveness. It is the heavenly paradigm. It is what forgiveness involves. But the atoning act is not a simple paradigm. It involves a complex of images and occasions. Williams attempted to develop the way in which this act converts our old knowledge into new. Man, he thinks, is, because of his choice in the Fall, both sinner and victim. He is the victim of his own sin. Man victimizes himself as he victimized the Incarnate One. Man's chance of any return to the old knowledge is to know that he is, in fact, a victim of his own sin. If man can know this "then it should be conceded to him to know the endured evil as good: not certainly the original good, for that could not be, but another, a new good: 'a pain by truth, a bliss by love'" ²² Christ is, of course, the great demonstration of the knowing of endured evil as good.

The fate of the Incarnate One exhibits another pattern. It is simply, "the loss of life for the saving of life."²³ That is the pattern of life and of forgiveness. Sometimes this patterns demands an actual loss of life, and sometimes it means only that we are to carry

22. Ibid., p. 185.

23. Williams, He Came Down, p. 51.

someone else's cross, but it always means that the self is to be lost in God and neighbor.²⁴

The divine patterns exhibited in Christ's redemption of the co-inherence pointed, for Williams, to another fact of existence. Christ came and accepted the necessities of His creation. He suffered them and redeemed them. His involvement in the hard good of life, his suffering the judgements of his creatures, his down-coming and humility in deriving from his creatures and his ultimate victory indicate to Williams that, whether we see it or not, all that happens in this world, all chance, or luck as we call it, is nothing but good. The praise of blessed luck is an extreme romantic position, but it is also the orthodox Christian position, Williams tells us.²⁵ The birth, life and death and resurrection of Christ mark the death of tragedy. There is nothing more to be said about it. As Gabriel reminds Hell and Pride in The House by the Stable,

Toil and spoil as you will, still in the end
the flick of every chance must fall right. ²⁶

That the good is hard, the way rough, is no way
contradicts the fact that all luck is good. God is good

24. This sentence wrote too easily initially and each time I reread it I have the gravest suspicion that it is a close paraphrase of either Williams or Mrs. Shideler. I have so far not been able to confirm my suspicions.

25. Williams, Beatrice, p. 122.

26. Williams, The House By the Stable, in Religious Drama 3, p. 47.

and providence is God and therefore providence is good.²⁷

Again, if we see both good and bad fortune, the 'badness' of fortune is only in the seeing, never in the thing.

Williams's Christmas play, The Death of Good Fortune is built around the theme of the goodness of all fortune. Mary's opening soliloquy leads up to Williams's argument that the substance of the world and of existence is love and that therefore all happenings are good.

There is on earth a being called Good luck;
 he has spun much joy; his nature is heavenly,
 but when men fell, he was half-blinded;
 he does not know himself nor do men know him.
 I have determined that in this town this very day
 this gay popular lord shall come to his change
 and a strange new vision of himself; for now
 my lord my son has made this clear--
 that all luck is good luck. And I,
 I struck by seven swords, witness too
 that all substance is love, all luck is good.
 Nor anywhere, for any flood of shed blood,
 sharp single anguish, or long languish of grief,
 shall any deny my word, or the great cry
 to every man upon earth of my lord your son--
 all chance is heavenly, all luck is good.²⁸

The outline of the play is simple, and its theme is that while all luck is good, it is the hard or terrible good which is meant. The king and especially the old woman think of good fortune as battles won, prosperous realms, comfortable houses and quiet futures. Good Fortune comes into

27. This is, of course, not my position on providence. I'm merely trying to argue Williams's position for him.

28. Williams, The Death of Good Fortune, p. 27.

the town and these things come about. But Good Fortune dies. Battles are lost, the realm is threatened, the promised house is refused to the old woman and her fortune is stolen. Mary resurrects Good Fortune. Then she pronounces the new pattern of Good Fortune, based on the pattern of the life and death of Christ.

When your god Good Fortunes dies, the only thing is to bid your god Good Fortune rise again. 29

Following some interchange of questions by the King and the magician, she reminds them, as Williams was always reminding his readers, that,

It is a great risk you run.

You may not, when it is done, much believe it. 30

To act, having suffered all, in the knowledge that all luck is good is a painful task. To believe that all luck is really good having acted is even more painful and we may not much believe it. Williams insisted, nevertheless, that it was true.

And you, great ones, you must always make your choice, or always, at least, know that the choice exists--all luck is good--or not; even when the ninth step is nine times as difficult as the first. 31

29. Ibid., p. 39.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

LIFE IN THE CO-INHERENCE

For Charles Williams, theology, no matter how esoteric, was really about everyday affairs when rightly understood. Although his novels deal with the extra-ordinary, it was everyday affairs, seen in the light of Christian theology, which occupied so much of Williams's time and interest. That theology is, as we should say now, relevant,, was the only reason Williams ever bothered with it. His writings are meant to illustrate what it means to live in a world created in the image of the divine Trinity; a world in which man has chosen to know the good as evil; a world redeemed by an Incarnate One; a world in which we are confronted by a terrible good. These facts either mean everything to our lives or nothing. To Williams they meant everything. They were, simultaneously historical facts and metaphysical principles. They revealed the nature of God, the nature of man, the ultimate objectives of existence, the function for which we were created, and the means whereby we are to attain the ultimate objectives and fulfill our function. These facts indicated the necessity of a certain style of life, a style which

Williams called the Way of the Affirmation of Images.

On The Nature Of Things And The Way Of The Affirmation
of Images

The two chief ways of approach to God in Christian thought have been The Way of Rejection and The Way of Affirmation.¹ Of these two ways, it was the second which concerned Williams. The great doctor of this way was Dante, and the great summa of this way is the Divine Comedy. The Divine Comedy was Williams's great theological handbook, and his long commentary on it, The Figure of Beatrice is by his admission, in part, an examination of The Way of the Affirmation of Images.²

This way of approach historically has been overshadowed, and in some periods almost obliterated, by the Way of Rejection. The great mystics have been, with few exceptions, practitioners of the Way of Rejection or negation, and the monasteries have stood as witnesses to the special sanctity this way of approach to God was felt to have. Until quite recently, the idea of sanctity was particularly associated with the way of negation. At particular moments in the last century and in our century, it has often been assumed that if one embraced the Way of Affirmation, one

1. Williams, Beatrice, pp. 8-9.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

could not possibly be religious at all - far from it. In our own day it is a widespread homilectical practice to equate the Way of Affirmation with secularism and the Way of Rejection with sanctity. It was against these notions that Charles Williams mustered a good part of his literary forces.

Before we see what use Williams made of the Way of the Affirmation of Images, it would be well to define what he meant by the Way. I shall only briefly touch on his understanding of this Way and some of its problems. since a fuller definition would lead us into the dark field of symbolism and theology.

The first and most obvious point to make is that Williams entitled this way "The Way of the Affirmation of Images." This is a question-begging title. It is, in fact, problematic. The problem rests in two words and their juxtaposition: affirmation and images. I see the label, the Way of the Affirmation of Images as the expression of a great cultural synthesis: a synthesis between Greek and Hebraic world-views. The Greeks spoke of images but they did not affirm them and the Hebrews spoke of affirmation but not often of images. Williams's use of the word 'image' reveals a certain philosophical predisposition. By 'image' Williams meant 'symbol'. He chose the word image rather than the word symbol "because it seems to me doubtful if the word symbol nowadays sufficiently

expresses the vivid individual existence of the lesser thing."³ He derived his philosophy of the symbol from Coleridge who had come to his conception of the symbol through German Idealism. In our day Professor Tillich carries on this philosophy of symbol. To be a symbol, something must (a) exist in itself; (b) derive from something greater than itself; and (c) represent in itself that greatness from which it derives.⁴ Creation, for Plato, was itself symbolic. The real was not a symbol, but that which creation both pointed towards and veiled. To caricature the system, it was only by going beyond the symbols that the really real could be apprehended. The key activity was contemplation, and once the real was glimpsed, the symbol could be ignored. Greek thought on the whole was more concerned with affirming the real than the symbols. Any mistaking of the symbols for reality was of course ignorance, and ignorance to a Greek was a wicked thing.

The Way of the Affirmation of Images, however, insists that the images must be affirmed. Any forgetfulness in this matter is precisely a sin. If the image happens to be one's neighbor the forgetfulness is a violation of the Second Commandment, which is like unto the First

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Ibid.

and Great Commandment. The image can be so affirmed because the Christian doctrine of Creation cancels out the Greek dualism. Creation is in the image of the Trinity. Through this creation the Trinity can be apprehended and this Creation is itself good. This Creation is also not the Trinity but the creation. Creation is not created as Trinity but in the image of the Trinity. If this is forgotten, pantheism results. Creation in the image of the Trinity means that creation is different from the Trinity. As Dorothy Sayers puts this whole matter:

Every creature in it (the Creation) possesses a true self which however much perfected or (in Dante's words) 'in-Godded' is never swallowed up or lost in God. Therefore, all God's creatures are images of Him in the same way, and to the same limited extent, as a work of art is an image of its maker - his, yet in a manner distinct from him.⁵

The doctrine of Creation indicates that images are to be affirmed, but it does not ultimately affirm Creation as an image. The doctrine of Creation requires the affirmation. The doctrine which most fully reveals creation to be completely symbolic is the Incarnation. It reveals and seals the symbolic nature of Creation. The Incarnation reveals the symbolic potential of Creation - that in it God can dwell. To quote Dorothy Sayers again:

5. D. L. Sayers, Further Papers on Dante, Harper & Bros., 1957, p. 187.

From the Incarnation springs the whole doctrine of sacraments - the indwelling of the mortal by the immortal, of the material by the spiritual, the phenomenal by the real.'⁶

Williams took as the very maxim of the Way of the Affirmation of Images that clause dealing with the Incarnation in the Athanasian creed: 'Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God.'⁷

This clause contains the root principle by which creation and existence can be understood as symbolic. The 'conversion of the Godhead into flesh' would have cancelled out the symbolic principle and would have left us, to put it lightly, wandering and waiting Barthians. "Manhood into God" expresses the appropriate direction for a symbolic understanding of, if not all of creation, at least of man. That Manhood is taken into God is the key thought here. Some lines from Williams's play Seed of Adam express quite well the relation between the Incarnation and the nature of existence and creation as symbolic. Mary speaks:

Joseph, come, take me to Bethlehem;
there the apparition and the presence are one,
and Adam's children are one in them;
there is the way of Paradise begun. ⁸

Christ is the apparition (man) and the presence (God).

The Incarnation is the great affirming principle of existence and simultaneously the justification of existence

6.

7. Williams, Beatrice, p. 9. Dove, p. 59.

8. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 81.

as symbolic. It points toward the nature of existence as symbolic and demands affirmation as the appropriate response to the created order. Being both things it is also the assurance of reasonableness and order in the creation. It reveals how nature and man are related to God and in so doing describes a way for man to follow in seeking his ordained end. Life itself holds the possibility of man so realizing his symbolic nature as to become, for his neighbors, an Incarnation of a sort or the mother of the Incarnation. The Way of Affirmation is a way of coming to this end, this union.

The Way of Affirmation is a means of being but also a means of knowing. It is, in fact, the great romantic way of knowing. Dante's entire work is nothing less than "a description of the great act of knowledge, in which Dante himself is the knower, and God is the known, and Beatrice is the knowing."⁹ The way is also "the way of approach of the soul to its ordained end."¹⁰ To Williams this way was characterized by three stages or degrees: Justice, charity and union.¹¹ Union, or co-inherence, was the ultimate stage or degree in the Way of Affirmation. "The name of God is that which all creation in its different kinds and degrees, aspired to know, to utter and to become."¹²

9. Williams, Beatrice, p. 231.

10. Ibid., p. 8.

11. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 137.

12. Williams, He Came Down, p. 101.

This understanding of Creation, and more specifically matter, and existence is generally described as sacramental or Incarnational. Williams, however, objected to the word 'sacramental'. For him the word, in popular usage, tended to dichotomize too much; "it divides, while professing to unite; and, in popular use, it throws over the light of the serious object a false light of semi-religious portentousness."¹³ It suggests also that the spiritual makes use of the physical rather than a common, a single, operation.¹⁴ Williams wished to make it clear that the two co-inhere; that the spiritual does not use the physical or vice versa, but that they co-exist and co-inhere each in the other and that if there is any question of subordination, each is subordinate to the other. The Incarnation directs us to the proper understanding of the sacramental nature of reality. It was not a theophany. The Incarnate One did not manifest Himself in fictitious flesh but real flesh. Nor was the flesh overwhelmed and changed into something that was not flesh. Christ submitted to the flesh and the flesh submitted to Christ. The relation between man and God in Christ was not a moral union but a real union, this real union being understood by Williams as interpenetration or co-inherence.

13. Williams, Beatrice, p. 65.

14. Williams, Image of the City, p. 85.

The Way of the Affirmation of Images is not the only way of the spirit's approach to God. Williams insisted on this, but his insistence was at times more out of courtesy than out of real concern. The maxim of living and knowing in the co-inherence is: 'This also is thou; neither is this thou.'¹⁵ This maxim is the key for understanding symbols. The symbol shares a common identity with its referent, yet in being a symbol it is different from its referent. Article twenty-eight of the Thirty-nine Articles objects to transubstantiation because it tends to completely identify the symbol with its base or referent, and thereby it 'overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament.' The Way of Negation emphasizes the difference between the symbol and its base, while the Way of Affirmation emphasizes the identity. Neither way however can achieve its end without some courtesy to the other. They are not exclusive but complementary ways. They co-inhere. Neither way can exist exclusive of the other. This would be wrong in principle, and has never been so in fact. Williams was fond of pointing out that even St. John of the Cross, that great refuser of images, "towards the end was encouraged to remember that he like asparagus."¹⁶

15. Williams, Dove, p. xiv.

16. Williams, Dove, quoted by C. S. Lewis in Arthurian Torso, Oxford Univ. Press, 1948, pp. 175-176.

Until Dante, mankind seemed to know the world only in its awful difference from God. Its motto was "Neither is this thou", only causually and infrequently footnoted by "This also is thou." Williams wondered if this early predominance of the Way of Negation was not due to the necessity of first establishing, "the awful difference between God and the world before we could be permitted to see the awful likenss."¹⁷ Williams attempted to show the "awful likeness" between God and the world.

Because of the way he understood Creation and Incarnation and the existence of the Trinity, the Way of Negation seems almost out of the question as a real option for life. It remained for Williams a handy footnote especially in his conception of the 'hard good' of life and of the dynamics of faith. Miss Sayers too sees the problems involved in the Way of Negation and decides that for her, the Way of Affirmation is "more characteristically Christian."¹⁸ In the end Williams concurred: "After the affirmations we may have to discover the rejections, but we must still believe that after the rejections the greater affirmations are to return."¹⁹

The Orthodoxy of the Blood and the Matter of Matter

Williams's dedication to the Way of the Affirmation

17. Williams, Beatrice, p. 9.

18. Sayers, Further Paper on Dante, p. 188.

19. Williams, Beatrice, p. 10-11.

of Images is most strikingly seen in his thoughts about matter and more specifically about the human body. He left, in most cases, the formulation of doctrine to the theologians of the church. His vocation was the thorough-going pursuit of doctrinal implications. Perhaps in his understanding of the in-Godding of matter and in his concern with an orthodoxy of the blood he has, in our eyes, gone too far. Most of us cannot see the glory of creation and the precise glory of the Creator in debris floating in the Thames. Most of us do not even aspire to such revelations. We prefer to feel, and perhaps rightly, that the eyes of true faith are characterized by a certain myopia, no doubt a divine gift. The church, Williams felt, had become rather too myopic both about the body in itself, and consequently about the body in relation to others - in sexual matters, for instance.

Williams conception of the body illustrates the richness of his image - making powers and the unsystematic and organic nature of his thought. It is impossible to see a logical development in his understanding of the body, and consequently only particular moments in his imagery can be pointed to. A certain deliciousness of concept is apparent in his treatment of the body which also, in lesser degree, characterizes his work as a whole. Williams occasionally carried this deliciousness too far,

and deliciousness, carried too far is, of course, sickening.

An early, and entirely unfortunate poem serves as a good introduction to his conception of the body, while serving also to show how unpromising his early poetry was.

O what religion could I have
But this that honors truly
A poor dishonourable slave
By it exalted newly?

How to us sourly oft misseemed,
Through anger or derision
These princely bodies, now redeemed
By loving arts of vision!

Mental obedience did avouch
The Spiritual paeon:
Who guessed Divinity could couch
In this supposed Augean?

Chaos is brought into accord
Now, hushed in rosy laughter,
We worship, though a single Lord
In double mode hereafter.

Hands, bound but to a simple pledge,
Discover new vocations;
Instincts, our bodies' depths that dredge
Grow teachers of salvation.

O who can doubt the perfect whole
In his eternal trysting -
Love, of the reasonable soul
And human flesh subsisting. 20

While the church might have been myopic about "these princely bodies," many authors of Williams' time were not. Williams was caught up in the literary interests of his day, but he was caught up in them as a devoted and thinking Christian, and as such, he was ahead of his time. It was

20. Williams, Poems of Conformity, 'Commentaries - V'.

D. H. Lawrence who showed Williams new visions of the body. Williams was an early admirer of Lawrence, and he found him, in most cases, not only literarily satisfying but theological-ly sound. Certainly Lawrence was a heretic, Williams said, "but he was concerned with a Christian orthodoxy - the orthodoxy of the blood of Man."²¹ More specifically, the Athanasian Creed insists "precisely on what he (Lawrence) was always emphasizing: that the life of 'sensuality' and the life of 'substance' cannot be separated and must not be confused."²² Williams wasn't, of course, able to follow the interests of his generation in what became almost complete literary devotion to various mucous membranes of the body. There is something deeply erotic in his novels and poetry, but there is little 'sex' in the ordinary sense. One of the few times he paused to describe a sexual affair, it was an affair, not between two humans but between a man and a demonic projection of his own ego.²³ A description of Lester Furnival in All Hallows' Eve caricatures what in some cases, the D. H. Lawrence trend was to develop into: "She had the common vague idea of her age that if your sexual life was all right you were all right, and she had the common vague

21. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 75.

22. Ibid., p. 74.

23. In Descent Into Hell

idea of all ages that if you (and your sexual life) were not all right, it was probably someone else's fault - perhaps undeliberate, but still their fault."²⁴ Williams never sympathized with either common vague idea and didn't care to examine or describe them literarily.

He did sympathize with Lawrence's interest in the orthodoxy of the blood and considered that it was, in fact, an unbalanced Christian piety which drove men like Lawrence to their own heresies. Christian orthodoxy and the Christian man had become altogether too ethereal and spiritual. While the Way of Negation was a legitimate religious option, the Way of the Rejection of the body and bodily acts has never been specifically Christian. The church, and especially its divines, had become so engaged in things of the spirit that Coventry Patmore's daughter (and Williams used this as an epigram of the age) could seriously ask, "Father, isn't marriage a rather wicked sacrament?"²⁵ The church, wrote Williams, "had refined the body into an unreal phantom of dim light and called it the Resurrection. Their morals aimed at a docetic Christ, and the awful creeds recalled them in vain."²⁶ What the church had officially suppressed doctrinally, Manicheanism, Docetism, a moral

24. Williams, Eve, pp. 16-17.

25. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 68.

26. Ibid., p. 72.

union only of God and man, it embraced ethically. Even in a church which acknowledged the importance of matter doctrinally, which seems to be our position today, Williams felt that, heretofore, "when the official representatives of the church have talked about such things as sexual love... they may have said the right things, but they said them in the wrong style."²⁷

This same Manichean or docetic tendency of interpretation makes Dante's Comedy inexplicable or precious or dry as dust. There have been spiritualizers of the New Testament and of Dante both. Dante, Williams thought, maintained the New Testament perspective on matter and body. Neither are to be spiritualized. Dante met and fell in love with Beatrice - who was neither theology, nor grace, not the vision of God only, but a Florentine girl. Dante was no mere cerebralist. "It is not" he wrote, "too much to say that (Dante's) sex, like his intellect, was awakened."²⁸ And finally,

In the spiritualizers, however, she (Beatrice) becomes so dim that she is, in fact, nothing but a kind of vapour of the soul, a mist that goes up out of the ground of the heart. Since it is obvious that very few young lovers are going to be interested in that, there is nothing in the two later parts of the Commedia for them to be interested in; and they are therefore left with the Inferno in which, after the first

27. Ibid. p. 69.

28. Williams, Beatrice, p. 20.

two or three cantos, she does not appear...to spiritualize Beatrice away from earth into a pseudo-Romanticism is, in criticism, very much like mortal sin. 29

Not only had the church's gilding of the body precluded creative thought on sexual matters, it had, according to Williams, precluded any proper understanding of the body as a religious symbol and any understanding of the role of the flesh in our salvation.

The body as an organic unity of parts and functions intrigued Williams. The parts and functions of the body co-inhere and in their co-inherence they mirror and participate in the substance of creation. The parts of the body are 'in love' with one another. The body is, to put it simply, a living symbol of divine realities. "The structure of the body," he wrote, "is an index to the structure of a greater whole."³⁰ Williams admitted that the great Doctor of the Way of Affirmation, Dante, did little with the idea of the body as a divine symbol.³¹ His key quote about the body as an index is from Wordsworth but it is not apparent that Wordsworth had much interest in such symbolism either. The development of

29. Ibid., p. 101.

30. Williams, The Image of the City. p. 81.

31. Williams, Beatrice. p. 64.

this symbolism seems to be Williams's own concern.³² The quote from Wordsworth which Williams used over and over again whenever he discussed the body is from The Prelude.

The human form
To me became an index of delight,
of grace and honour, power and worthiness. 33

The body as an index is a 'living epigram of virtue.'³⁴ Virtue is actually lodged both in the spiritual and the physical aspects of the body. The body is a divine compact of co-inherences. Nor is it only the more seemly parts which possess and image greater realities. This is true

"...even with those poor despised things,
the buttocks. There is no seated figure,
no image of any seated figure, which does
not rely on them for its strength and
balance. They are at the bottom of the
sober dignity of judges; the grace of a
throned woman; the hierarchial session
of the Pope himself reposes on them..." 35

In his Taliessin poems³⁶ the world is laid out in the image of the body, and 'conversely, the human body, seen in the light of the throne,³⁷ is an image of the

32. Mrs. Ridler suggests that it was in A. E. Waite's neo-hermetic work, The Secret Doctrine of Israel that Williams found the foundations for his thought on the symbolism of the body. Ridler, op. cit., p xxv.

33. Quoted by Williams, The Image of the City, p. 80.

34. Ibid., p. 84.

35. Ibid., p. 85.

36. Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars.

37. Lewis is employing Williams's terminology here. The phrase 'in the light of the throne' can best be understood as 'with the eyes of faith.'

Empire of the Kingdom of God."³⁸ To pause for a quick anatomical geography lesson: the Cauces regions ('Caucasia') are the buttocks of the world symbolizing natural or lusty pleasures; Jerusalem is the genitals of the world; Gaul is the breasts - symbolized as such because Gaul was the source of the 'trigonometrical milk of doctrine.'³⁹

"The wonder, the thrill, of a shoulder or a hand" wrote Williams, "awaits its proper explanation."⁴⁰ The wait is over, of course, when you begin to read Williams and on too many occasions the wait now comes from long descriptions which begin with a bent arm and having gone through skies and celestial spheres and seventh heavens and finally into the very kingdom of God itself, the story can go on again.⁴¹ Williams, however, by drawing out its implications, was able to transform a simple romantic insight into a significant concept. A sequence of quotes from *Witchcraft* illustrate this. He begins quite simply:

...there is the human body, and the movements of the human body. Even now, when, as a general rule, the human body is not supposed to mean anything, there are moments when it seems, in spite of ourselves, packed with significance...

38. C.S. Lewis, Arthurian Torso, pp. 107-108.

39. Williams, Taliessin Through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars, Oxford Univ. Press, 1954, p. 8.

40. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 74.

Here, one is aware that a phenomenon, being wholly itself, is laden with universal meaning. A hand lighting a cigarette is the explanation of everything; a foot stepping from a train is the rock of all existence.⁴²

If, after this, we are able to read on, we come to see that Williams might not, after all, be writing sheer romantic nonsense. Granted, with Williams we can never be sure; but let's say that we do go on. We find him developing the initial romantic insight:

But if the human body is capable of seeming so, so are the controlled movements of the human body - ritual movements, or rather movements that seem like ritual. A finger pointing is quite capable of seeming not only a significant finger, but a ritual finger; an evocative finger; not only a finger of meaning but a finger of magic. Two light dancing steps by a girl may (if one is in the state) appear to be what all the Schoolmen were trying to express; they are (only one cannot quite catch it) an intellectual statement of beatitude. But two quiet steps by an old man may seem like the very speech of hell.⁴³

And then he finally arrives at his goal:

Ordered movement, ritual, is natural to men. But some ages are better at it, are more used to it, and more sensitive to it, than others. The Middle Ages liked great spectacle, and therefore (if for no other reasons - but there were many) they liked ritual. They talked in ritual - blazons declared it. They were nourished by ritual - the Eucharist exhibited it. They made love by ritual - the convention of courtly love preserved it. Certainly also they did these things without ritual - but ritual (outside the inner experience) was the norm. And ritual maintains and increases that natural

42. Williams, Witchcraft, p. 78.

43. Ibid.

sense of the significance of movement. And, of course, of formulae, of words.⁴⁴

In these passages Williams moves from undefined "movements of the body" to a "hand lighting a cigarette", a "foot stepping from a train"; from these to the expression of scholastic beatitude by the steps of a dancing girl and finally to some insight into the ritual movement and its significance.

The imagery of the body is not mere imagery but "divine imagery."⁴⁵ But the body plays more of a role in our salvation than simply imaging divine things. It is 'in the body' that we live now and it will be 'in the body' that we shall live after the resurrection. The body, with all its apparent defects, contrary urges, and powerful appetites allows us and inspires us to a life of virtue, to love, to seek for a full life in the co-inherence. The body, even when the spirit thinks it is completely autonomous and independent, must co-inhere with, at least, other things. It must eat.

Quite simply then, Williams felt that "the operations of matter are a means of the operation of Christ."⁴⁶ And more specifically in regard to the body: "We carry about with us an operative synthesis of the Virtues; and it

44. Ibid., p. 79.

45. Williams, Dove, p. 58.

46. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 68.

may be held that when we fall in love (for example), we fall in love precisely with the operative synthesis."⁴⁷ Lionel Rackstraw in War In Heaven, agonizing over the complete irrationality and horrible obscenity of the universe, was kept in the co-inherence by feeling that at least his body was sane.⁴⁸

The body is a divine image. The body gently nudges us on the way to eternal life. To these two functions must be added a third; the body thinks.

"Flesh knows what spirit knows,
but spirit knows it knows..."⁴⁹

and further on,

"Flesh tells what spirit tells
(but spirit knows it tells.)..."⁵⁰

The introductory poem of this section of the paper reveals what flesh knows and tells:

"Instincts, our bodies depths that dredge
Grow teachers of salvation."

In his Introduction to The Forgiveness of Sins Williams clarifies this concept to a degree. We know we can never be right in our finite speculations about the infinite? Williams agrees. Then why speculate? Quite simply because "the blood holds the need;

47. Ibid., p. 86.

48. Williams, War, p. 19.

49. Williams, Taliessin Through Logres And The Region of the Summer Stars, p. 26, in Region.

50. Ibid., p. 27.

our physical natures awake thought and even in some sense think; they measure good and evil after their kind....It is in our bodies that the secrets exist. Propitiation,expiation, forgiveness, are maintained there when the mind has explained them away - the need, and the means, and the fruition."⁵¹

It was this physical necessity which broke out and blossomed in men like D. H. Lawrence, and because of the age, it had to break out as a glorious paganism. The "awful creeds" hold the way of return if we are willing not only to recite them but to hear them and act on them.

WHOSOEVER WILL BE SAVED: BEFORE ALL THINGS IT
IS NECESSARY THAT HE HOLD THE CATHOLIC FAITH....
For the right faith is, that we believe and confess:
that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is
God and man;
God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before
the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his
Mother, born in the world; Perfect God, and
perfect Man" of a reasonable soul and human
flesh subsisting;...
Who although he be God and Man: yet he is not two
but one Christ;
One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh:
but by taking of the Manhood into God; etc.

The Incarnation, and the creedal statements about the Incarnation direct us to a serious affirmation of the body. In fact Divinity did couch in this "supposed Augean." Mary, in Seed of Adam, says of herself,

"He has thrust
into this matter his pattern of bones..."⁵²

51. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 109.. .

52. Williams, Selected writings, p. 80.

Williams felt that it was now necessary for the church to enter into a new era of Christological understanding. It took centuries for the church to work out the doctrine of Christ as God, and the implications of this doctrine for the life of the church. It is now high time some thought be given to working out what it means that Christ was man.

It is the following of our Lord in this knowledge of the creature which has been a part of the work of Christendom and may well be a greater part in the future....The...doctrine of his Manhood, with its corollaries, has still to be worked out and put into action.⁵³

Williams recounts with high approval, the suggestion ("made neither profanely nor scandalously") that there might be an order of the Christian Church "to our sacred Lord as 'a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.'"⁵⁴ The 'Sacred Order of Gluttons and Winebibbers' are to witness to the creatureliness of the Lord and the faith and therefor to the Godliness of creatureliness, against a prevailing order (of opinion at least) which could be named 'The Sacred Order of Locust and Wild Honey Eaters.' The Baptist, we must remember, was the precursor only and not the Messiah, and his ascetical fare and ways were not obviously appreciated by the Messiah who spent a

53. Ibid., p. 134.

54. Ibid., p. 133.

good part of his time banqueting with, and feeding, people. The preeminent danger of such a way of affirmation, of fully embracing the doctrine of Christ as man, is not a new glorious paganism but a false sacramentalism or, to use Williams's label, a pseudo-romanticism. False sacramentalism leads to a mis-sanctification of natural eroticism. Characteristically, holy water is sprinkled too much and in the wrong places in this false sacramentalism. "The maxim," he tells us, "for any love affair is 'Play and pray; but on the whole do not pray when you are playing and do not play when you are praying.'"⁵⁵ Williams did not quote the maxim merely to be humorous. It points to a principle worthy of our attention, which is, simply put, that playing and praying are basically similar operations. Praying is a communion with God; so can be playing.

55. In Lewis, Arthurian Torso, p. 58.

CHAPTER VI

THE FALL INTO HEAVEN: THE OUTLINE OF ROMANTIC THEOLOGY

Williams was concerned with both playing and praying, but he chose playing as the subject of a systematic theological investigation. By 'playing' we can loosely understand all that about a love affair which has not been traditionally considered religious. Williams set about to understand romantic love theologically and theologically as it was a part of the general Way of the Affirmation of Images. The passage which sets romantic love within his scheme of concepts is worth quoting again.

Romantic love between the sexes is but one kind of romantic love, which is but a particular habit of Romanticism as a whole, which is itself but a particular method of the Affirmation of Images."¹

The general direction of Williams's thought on romantic love and its theological implications can be gathered from a second quote in which he discusses "falling in love."

1. Williams, Beatrice, p. 63.

It is a not unpleasant thought that the word Fall occurs in this experience also; as if the divine grace, after man had insisted on falling once into a divided and contradictory knowledge, had arranged itself to trick him into an unexpected fall into restored and single knowledge.²

Williams held that to fall in love is precisely, but usually only momentarily, to experience the Kingdom and to experience redemption. This was certainly more than a theory for him; it was, as he might say, in the blood. The dedication to his wife in his essay He Came Down From Heaven reads, "To Michal by whom I began to study the Doctrine of Glory." Nor was this coupling of Christian theology and romantic love a mere literary habit. He was sincere about it. It became a cause. It is perhaps a simple idea. As might be expected, it was not appealing to a great many people who had ideas about Christian theology and romantic love, or either. Williams was very early suspected of a great heresy. He was accused, in short, of not knowing the difference between a sanctuary and a bedroom, or as some felt, a brothel. The book which caused such accusations was Poems of Conformity published in 1917. That the accusation was not sheer nonsense can be seen by a description of one of his poems by a friendly commentator: "He sees his lady

2. Williams, He Came Down, p. 71.

as a twin in small human fashion of the Blessed Virgin Mother of Christ because she has produced love, in herself and in him, and this love is, in small human fashion, the twin of Christ, the supreme love."³ This same commentator describes the attack of Williams's book. A copy of Poems of Conformity was sent to an American, Theodore Maynard, to review. Maynard was suspicious and, after having his suspicions confirmed by "three Roman Catholic priests, one Baptist and two agnostics"⁴ he launched his attack. "He thought," writes Mrs. Hadfield, "that Conformity showed that Charles was a Satanist, a phallic worshipper in a Christian dress, making a cunning attack on Christian faith and morality by using Christian dogma and ritual as symbols of lust, and the Virgin Mary and Christ as screens for Venus and Eros."⁵ And where did Mrs. Hadfield think the problem lay? "Poor Mr. Maynard was a Roman Catholic, and extremely worried."⁶ Williams protested Maynard's attack and their differences seem to have been reconciled when they met together. The incident ended, according to Mrs. Hadfield with Maynard

3. Hadfield, op. cit., pp. 42-43. The general theme of much of his early poetry is that love does more than Chalcedon to justify God's ways to man.

4. Ibid., p. 47.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid. Perhaps the most patronizing sentence in all of modern biography - poor Mr. Maynard!

"convinced of the honourableness of Charles's religious intentions, and (Maynard) declared he was a major poet and only needed to become a Roman Catholic to remove his defects. This was handsome amends, if one could rely on Mr. Maynard's judgement."⁷

Later in his life, Williams wrote a book on romantic theology which, according to another admirer and commentator, Mrs. Anne Ridler, "was not fully approved of by the authorities to whom he showed it, and was never published."⁸ Mrs. Ridler fails to identify these authorities. Did Williams show his book to "three Roman Catholic priests, one Baptist and two agnostics" or did he show it to a publisher who thought it had no market?

Nevertheless, he managed to publish his theology of romantic love between covers of books which purported to be on other topics, and he managed perpetually to relate "the experiences of earthly marriage to the history of the Divine Word on earth."⁹ Williams proposed to show the implications of the "awful creeds" for this great phenomenon in human life. "Too long Religion dreamed while lovers slept."¹⁰ He fashioned himself a great awakener in this matter.

7. Ibid.

8. Ridler, op. cit., p. xlii.

9. Ibid.

10. Williams, Poems of Conformity, 'Sonnet IX'.

Several preliminary definitions and a narrowing of perspective are needed before Williams's thoelogy can be explored. The term 'romantic love' should be generally defined, and the use Williams makes of this romantic love should be discussed. One quote is sufficient to show that Williams was not working with the common definition of his terms. "Love," he wrote, "was even more mathematical than poetry; it was the pure mathematics of the spirit."¹¹

Romantic love can, for our purposes, be defined by reference to its origins. Charles Williams so defined it. His handbook of the history of romantic love was C.S. Lewis's Allegory of Love. In the middle ages "there entered into the relation between the sexes a philosophical, even a religious, idea."¹² C. S. Lewis describes the far-reaching effects of this new idea.

'...French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched, and they erected impassable barriers between us and the classical past or the Oriental present. Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature.' .¹³

11. Williams, Hell, p. 69.

12. Williams, He Came Down, p. 64.

13. C. S. Lewis, quoted by Williams, He Came Down, p. 64.

In origin this romantic species of passion was both extra-marital and extra-ecclesiastical. The church, up to the medieval period made little or nothing of love between the sexes.¹⁴ Later, in the scholastic systems, the pre-dominating moment of sinfulness in this new romantic species of passion became the failure of reason brought about by the passion it so readily displayed. Romantic love clouded the reason and the clouding of reason was a medieval sin of the first order.¹⁵ Even passion in marriage was bad. The whole business was poorly received by the church. In sum,

The general impression left on the medieval mind by its official teachers was that all love - at least all such passionate and exalted devotion as a courtly poet thought worthy of name - was more or less wicked.¹⁶

A new view of romantic love grew up which was to find definitive statement and theological defense in the writings of Dante. This new understanding was that not only did love not blind reason, it led to a higher reason.

It began to be asserted that 'passion' precisely existed and illuminated the intellect, that it delivered from 'accidia', excited to 'caritas', and even (strangest reversal of all!) that such a passion could exist as or in marriage. The idea of marriage as a way of the soul became a possibility.¹⁷

14. cf. Williams, Dove. p. 130.

15. Ibid.

16. C. S. Lewis, quoted by Williams, Dove. p. 130.

17. Williams, Dove. p. 131.

Romantic love was seen as a transforming power and after its 'baptism' was seen as a power which could transform a man from a state of sin to a state of grace. One of the shortest but clearest expressions of this transforming power of love is in Boccaccio's Decameron, and in particular, Novel I of the Fifth Day. The story tells how a certain rustic, Cymon, "a perfect idiot," is transformed by the sight of a beautiful lady to all manner of virtue and daring. This "perfect idiot" was saved from the characteristic Renaissance evils by gazing on the figure of a lady. As he gazed,

Presently, in his rude uncivilised breast, which had hitherto been incapable of receiving the least sense of good-breeding whatever, a sudden thought arose, which seemed to intimate to his gross and shallow understanding, that this was the most agreeable sight that ever was seen.¹⁸

The gaze set Cymon on the road to a new life.

Love having thus penetrated his heart, where no lesson of any kind could ever find admittance, in a little time his way of thinking and behavior were so far changed that his father and friends were strangely surprised at it, as well as everybody that knew him.¹⁹

His love for Iphegenia was the sole cause of Cymon's quest for learning and virtue, Boccaccio tells us. He learned philosophy, gave up for ever his rude and rustic speech,

18. Decameron, trans. by W. K. Kelly, London, Bell & Daldy, 1868, p. 251. Boccaccio seems to be straining to make his point here.

19. Ibid., p. 252.

grew also a master of music, and became expert and gallant in military art.²⁰

We need to follow the story no further than Boccaccio's explanation for such a miraculous transformation.

What, then, most gracious ladies, shall we say of Cymon? Surely nothing less than this; that all the noble qualities, which had been infused by Heaven into his generous soul, were shut up as it were by invidious fortune, and bound fast with the strongest fetters in a small corner of his heart, till love broke the enchantment, and drove with all its might these virtues out of that cruel obscurity, to which they had been long doomed, to a clear and open day; plainly showing whence it draws those spirits that are its votaries, and whither its mighty influence conducts them.²¹

All the Romantics attest to this transforming power of love. In an essay on romantic love Williams lets Wordsworth testify to these transforming moments.

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired.²²

These renovating spots of time are not, Williams explains, found only in romantic love between the sexes. These "moments of intense experience combined with potentiality of further experience" are found in great art, politics,

20. Ibid., p. 252.

21. Ibid., p. 253.

22. Quoted by Williams, He Came Down, p. 62.

nature and maturity.²³ But it is the romantic experience between the sexes which Williams, following the interest of the great Doctor, Dante, chose to examine.

The first questions Williams asked of this romantic tradition were, "is it serious? is it capable of intellectual treatment? is it capable of belief, labour, fruition? is it (in some sense or other) true?"²⁴ The second questions he put to it were "Can this state of things be treated as the first matter of a great experiment? and if so, what exactly is the material? and what exactly are the best conditions of the experiment?"²⁵ The answers to the first questions asked in He Came Down From Heaven are hinted at in The Figure of Beatrice. "One way or another this state is normal; what is not yet normal is the development of that state to its proper end."²⁶ To the second questions he answered, 'indeed yes'; 'the writings of Dante'; and perhaps 'accuracy in theology and understanding', respectively.

Before we discuss Williams experiment and its result, three further preliminary matters need to be mentioned. The first is the problem of the word 'romantic' or 'romanticism'. Williams felt that the word 'romantic'

23. Williams, He Came Down, p. 65.

24. Ibid., p. 66.

25. Ibid.

26. Williams, Beatrice, p. 16.

was almost hopelessly debased, having been captured, like the Pauline epistles, by the gnostics of romance, the sentimentalizers. He kept the word for three reasons. First, because of its convenience in describing that particular kind of sexual love, and secondly, because even today it includes other loves besides the sexual.²⁷ The third and most important reason was that he hoped by so using the word, to retrieve it from its corruptors and restore to it its proper meaning as he hoped to restore a proper understanding of the whole romantic tradition. He concludes with a warning: "The word should not be too narrowly confined to a literary manner," and a definition: "It defines an attitude, a manner of receiving experience."²⁸

The second matter is the term 'romantic theology' itself. What is the scope and method of such an enterprise? How are we to understand this unfamiliar combination of these two familiar words? Williams offers little in the way of definition here. Romantic theology, he wrote, is simply "Theology as applied to romantic experiences - as Mystical Theology is applied to mystical experiences; and Dogmatic Theology to thought about dogmas."²⁹

Finally, there is a problem of origins and sources involved. Is Williams's romantic theology simply an

27. Ibid., p. 14.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 29.

exegesis of Dante? Or is it Williams's reading back into Dante a theology which Dante never conceived or intended? Clearly, the answer to this lies somewhere between these alternatives. Mrs. Shideler chooses the second alternative:

Charles Williams' development of the theology of romantic love grew out of his discovery of the unexpected but precise analogy between the Christian doctrines which he had been taught since childhood, and the vivid personal experience of falling in love."³⁰

An early lecture on romantic theology contained only one quotation from Dante.³¹ This seems to be sufficient evidence that Williams's romantic theology was not simply an exegesis of Dante. His later method of presenting this theology relied heavily on Dante, but he customarily drew heavily on literature to develop or illustrate a point. His essay The Forgiveness of Sins begins with an analysis of forgiveness in Shakespeare.

The first important moment in romantic love is the so-called Beatrician moment, the moment of falling-in-love. There is, of course, no precise agreement on the dimensions and dynamics of this moment. "It is," Williams wrote, "neither sex appetite pure and simple; nor, on the other hand, is it necessarily related to marriage. It is something like a state of adoration, and it has been

30. Shideler, op. cit., p. 1.

31. Ridler, op. cit., p. xlii.

expressed, of course, by the poets better than by anyone else."³² Williams summarised the dimensions and characteristics of this moment by quoting, and commenting on passages from Dante's New Life. There are eight significant points.

- (1) The Romantic experience "arouses a sense of intense significance" which is coupled with "intense understanding."³³
- (2) The beloved is "the perfect centre and norm of humanity; others exist, it seems, because and in so far as, they resemble her virtue."
- (3) The beloved is apprehended in a certain radiance.
- (4) The beloved, in fact, "assists our faith" (Dante). And by faith, Williams explains, Dante meant faith in "Him who was crucified."
- (5) The lover feels a certain contentment in the apprehension of the beloved's physical appearance.
- (6) The glory is apt to dazzle the beholder. It is such bedazzlement which Williams thinks has led romantic love into superstition. He adds, "The effort after the pattern marks the difference. The superstitious make heaven and earth in the form of the beloved; the theology declares that the beloved is the first preparatory form of heaven and earth." He insists that Beatrice is a "means."

Points seven and eight are crucial, and deserve to be quoted more fully.

- (7) "'Her beauty has power to renovate nature in those who behold her, which is a marvellous thing. And this confirms what has been said...that she is the helper of our faith.' (Dante) This is perhaps the most profound, most universal and most widely confirmed saying of all. It is the Dantean equivalent of all the resolutions and reformations rashly attributed to the influence

32. Williams, He Came Down, p. 65.

33. Ibid., p. 68. The eight points are taken from pp. 68-71 of this work.

of the beloved. It is also the Dantean equivalent of the first coming of the Kingdom. He says, soon after: 'She was created not only to make a good thing better, but also to turn a bad thing into good.' Things intolerable outside a state of love become blessed within: laughter and love convert for a moment the dark habitations within the soul to renewed gardens in Eden. The primal knowledge is restored, and something like pardon restores something like innocence. The 'new life' exists. It cannot continue to exist permanently without faith and labour. Nothing that comes down from heaven can. But it renews nature if only for a moment; it flashes for a moment into the lover the life he was meant to possess instead of his own by the exposition in her of the life she was meant to possess instead of her own. They are 'in love'."

- (8) "She is the phenomenon of the centre; and the chief grace she bestows is humility - the self-forgetfulness which (only) makes room for adoration. She is the vision of the divine glory and the means of the divine grace, and she herself is irresponsible for it and almost irrelevant to it. She is the Mother of Love - of caritas, and even of a caritas beyond any caritas we can imagine; she is the chosen Mother of the good will of God."

A further quote from Dante illustrates the universal response of the lover. Romantic love begins between two people; it ends with God or in God. Dante's response to the salutation of Beatrice shows the first blossoming of the moment into a total orientation toward mankind.

"I say," Dante writes, "that when she appeared from any place, there was through my hope of her admirable salutation, no enemy remaining to me, but a flame of caritas possessed me; and if anyone had then asked me concerning anything, my answer would have been only love, with a face clothed in humility." ³⁴

34. Ibid., p. 72.

This state of caritas clothed in humility is the reflection and reality of the kingdom. It is the foretaste and the first moment of eternal life. It is, as point (7) explains, a renovation of our fallen nature to our unfallen nature. It is the presence of the new life. We are possessed, and possessed by a grace. It is not willed but given; not conceived but experienced. It is the knowledge by the lover of the potentiality of the beloved as a redeemed being. The romantic, the beatrician moment is a moment of revelation; it "is a moment of revelation and communicated conversion by means of a girl."³⁵ This moment is also a moment of choice. The vision of virtue in the lady presents

...the lover with a way of effort towards nobility and sanctity; say, of salvation - it is the simpler word. ³⁶

The choice is to follow the vision or to ignore it. "There is a brief time when the Imagination - the power of grasping images and exploring distances of meaning - remains suspended in a contemplation."³⁷ If the images are grasped and the imagination acts, faith comes about.

That Imagination in action becomes faith, the quality by which the truths within the image are actualized within us. But the temptation to turn aside is immediate, swift, subtle, and very sweet. It is only to linger in the moment, to desire to be lost passionately and permanently in the moment, to live only for the reoccurrence of the moment. ³⁸

35. Williams, Beatrice. p. 123.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

So far romantic love has been related to the Fall, the Christian virtue of charity, redemption into the new life, and in part, to faith. A lecture given by Williams relates more fully romantic love and Christian doctrine. In this lecture he offers 'four Evangelical Counsels of Romantic Theology.' They are, in short, that the experience of romantic love is real, eternal, divine and productive of charity.³⁹ It is, first, true precisely because of the Incarnation. It is, second, true because it is, after a certain manner, a new incarnation. The second follows and is possibly only because of the first.

The Divine thing of goodwill and humility which Dante had experienced springs from his experience of Beatrice; she is the Mother of the grace, and even therefore of the occult God. It is a result of the Incarnation that opened all potentiality of the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven in and through matter. 'My covenant shall be in your flesh.'⁴⁰

Grace is experienced by both the lover and the beloved in the Beatrician moment. But the grace belongs to neither, and neither is responsible for the grace. Beatrice is the Mother of grace for Dante and Dante for Beatrice, as the Virgin was the Mother of Grace for mankind. Every man is, because of the Incarnation potentially a 'theotokos' to others. This is made perfectly clear in the Descent of the Dove.

39. Summarized by Ridler, op. cit., p. xliii.

40. Williams, He Came Down, p. 74.

In certain states of romantic love the Holy Spirit has deigned to reveal, as it were, the Christ-hood of two individuals each to the other. He is himself the conciliator and it is there that the 'conciliation' - and the Reconciliation - begins. But this is possible only because of the Incarnation, because 'matter is capable of salvation,' because the anthropos is united with the theos, and because the natural and the supernatural are one Christ.⁴¹

And further on, "Christ was anthropos and theos; so after its kind, is human and romantic love."⁴² With the Incarnation we arrive again at the symbolic principle of the existence. The beloved is an active and potent symbol of the love which lies at the heart of creation. Through this symbol the redemptive love of God streams, pulling, as it were, our fallenness into a redemptive fall back into the Kingdom. "When Messias said: 'Behold my mother' he was," writes Williams, 'in this relation, merely accurate. The beloved (male or female) is seen in the light of a Paradisal knowledge and experience of good.'⁴³

Therefore the love in such an experience belongs neither to the beloved nor to the lover nor to both. To be 'in love' means precisely what it says - it means to be 'in love.': the love ~~that~~ which is born out of the Beatrician moment. And while this love is generally

41. Williams, Dove, p. 131.

42. Ibid., p. 134.

43. Williams, He Came Down, p. 77.

focused toward the beloved it is not properly, in its renovated state, for the beloved at all, but rather for all men. This is what the fourth evangelical counsel sets forth: "'The beatitude of love being seen, it briefly exists in us towards others.'"⁴⁴ Knowing this we can understand Mary's comments to Joseph in Seed of Adam. The sequence goes:

Joseph: Mary, you are changed; you are in love.

Marv: Yes, Joseph.

Joseph: (Starting up) Ah, ah! but who...?

Mary: No one, Joseph.
Only in love.

Joseph: It must be then with someone.

Mary: Dearest, you did not hear: we said in love.
Why must, how can, one be in love with someone?

Joseph: Because...but that is what in love means;
one is, and can only be, in love with someone.

Mary: Dearest, to be in love is to be in love,
no more, no less. Love is only itself,
everywhere, at all times, and to all objects.⁴⁵

One can only hope that Joseph fully apprehended these mysteries. If not, surely his early resolve to put the blessed creature away (privily) must have returned in swift anger. No matter what Joseph felt, the lines point to

44. quoted by Mrs. Ridler, op. cit., p. xliii.

45. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 80.

a characteristic of Williams's novels. For the most part, his novels portray people 'in love,' and not 'in love' with anyone in particular - just 'in love.' To list a few, the Archdeacon of Fardles in War in Heaven, Chloe Burnett in Many Dimensions, Aunt Sybil in The Greater Trumps, Lester Furnival and Betty Wallingford are all, to a degree merely 'in love.' It will be a great temptation for those, who like Joseph, find this absurd, inconvenient, or impossible, to put the novels away privily or not so privily.

Williams felt quite strongly about this state of being merely 'in love', and it cannot be dismissed as some trick insight or a minor point in the penumbra of romantic theology. This love, having been seen in and through the beloved and existing for all man is "the cardinal point."⁴⁶ Furthermore, "It does not mean a vague goodwill towards chinamen, but a definite humility towards one's neighbour. Humility is bestowed in that state of adoration, the lover - it is the cliché of sentimentality - feels unworthy. Of course he does, he is, and Romantic love is a state of facts."⁴⁷

Thus far only the Beatrician moment has been discussed.

46. quoted by Ridler, op. cit., p. xliii.

47. Ibid.

It is perhaps the most important moment in romantic love and is invested with greater theological significance than the other moments. In the theology of Romantic love it is far from being merely a matter of undefined erotic passion or a blinding of the 'higher' natures and functions of a person. This moment might contain within it infatuation, but it is not mere infatuation; it might encourage or produce 'blindness', but it is not mere blindness - rather more like the blindness caused by the bright light of the presence and glory of God.

Everything is from God. Christ's coming did not have meaning for every human effort and experience except romantic love. The theology of Romantic love, understood in the light of the coming of the Word Incarnate, maintains that when two people fall in love, the experience can be interpreted in at least some of the following ways. The experience of falling in love has within it an incarnation, a conversion, a revelation, a restoration of wholeness, a strengthening of faith and an appearance of the glory, all with profound significance and reference to others, to the community, to the co-inherence.

Falling-in-love contains within it a moment of incarnation analogous and dependent on the on Incarnation. Love comes down again from heaven and is incarnate in the beloved, and finally it is born in their relationship of love.

Falling-in-love contains within it a moment of conversion or at least we are presented with an offer of conversion. Without looking for it, love has been revealed to the lover in the beloved. The lover encounters love and is possessed; "something like pardon restores something innocence." This love breaks through to the lover and transforms him to the New Life, much like Cymon was transformed to the perfections of life as the Renaissance conceived them. This conversion is offered - it is a prevenient grace.

Falling-in-love contains within it a moment of revelation, of genuine revelation. The lover beholds a way of virtue, a way to eternal life in his vision of the beloved and its name is love. "The vision of romantic love is a vision of virtue in another, and by the union of his devotion with this a lover begins to follow the way."⁴⁸ The knowledge of the good as good is suddenly restored if only for a moment.

Falling-in-love contains within it a moment of wholeness. Dante expressed this by describing the effects of this moment on his heart, brain and liver, organs, which loosely translated mean 'the seat of spiritual emotions', the center of perception', and the place of

48. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 192.

corporal emotions' respectively.⁴⁹ This wholeness, expressed in modern terminology, roughly corresponds to the 'integration of the personality'. The person becomes one and at one with himself and becomes clearly focused - not on the beloved exclusively, but on love.

All this strengthens our faith and inspires it to action, and this action is communal. The moment of falling-in-love is primarily communal not individual, or at least its significance is communal. It is, in fact, no more an individual thing than the birth of Christ. It must happen at a particular time, in a particular place, and between particular persons, just as Christ's birth was at a particular time, in a particular place and of a particular human mother. Nevertheless, in all its particularity, Christ's birth was of universal significance, and the incarnation of love in the lovers is likewise of universal significance. It is a personal thing? Yes. But love is that. The scandal of particularity confronts us in romantic love as well as in the coming of Christ. It is a particularly Christian scandal. The lovers belong to the love which is born in them. And this love is 'love' not for someone at the exclusion of others. When love is born we must either love or not love. The lover

49. cf. Williams, He Came Down, p. 68.

must, "without a miracle, become the perfection he has seen."⁵⁰

Williams, in developing his theology of Romantic love, had to show that what we normally associate with romanticism as its very essence, are only, or merely, or most certainly, perversions of true romanticism. It is commonly felt that in romantic love the will is captured by the emotions - captured and demobilized; and that the intellect is clouded or seduced or overridden by strong passion: in short, that 'love is blind'. This love is felt to be personal, exclusively personal, having no reference to anyone besides the beloved. It is generally felt that anyone who allows himself to be struck down or pierced with this love is transformed into a weak, spineless, ridiculously stupid and rather selfish creature. This is the kind of love we laugh at in the movies. It is felt to reveal, much more than most experiences, the foibles of mankind. This is the popular conception of Romantic Love. It is not the only possible conception. For Williams this popular conception was due to heresies which have crept into our understanding of romantic love and which have, more than we might suppose, shaped this experience. "In fact, and in itself," he wrote, "it is a thing not of superstition and indulgence, but of doctrine and duty, and not a"

50. Williams, Beatrice, p. 38.

of achievement but of promise."^{50a} He formulated the doctrine, indicated the duties, apprehended the promise and attacked the heresies.

He referred to the heresies as "Hell's three principle attacks on the Way of Romantic Love."⁵¹ They are, (1) The assumption that it will naturally be everlasting; (2) the assumption that it is personal; (3) the assumption that it is sufficient."⁵²

The assumption that romantic love will be everlasting is false for at least two reasons: lovers fall out of love and lovers die. The heresy here is really, when love has been shattered or the beloved has died, in thinking that the glory has been entirely lost. This moment in the life of love was so important that Williams gave it a name: the moment of the death of Beatrice or the death of an image. Chapter three of The Figure of Beatrice is devoted to this moment. The moment and the impact of this moment on romantic love is analyzed in terms of the life of any young man.

He has met a young woman; he is attracted to her; his emotions are moved, his sensitiveness increased, his intellect excited, and that dim state of being which we call his soul purged and cleared. He is 'in love'. He is concerned (perhaps) to ask questions about this new quality of life.

50a. Williams, He Came Down, p. 65.

51. Ibid., p. 78.

52. Ibid.

It seems to him to have a terrible power, grand but (in a sense) ominous, related to every recognizable element in him.⁵³

She dies. Innumerable young lovers have mourned such a death. Innumerably more have regretted the disappearance if not of Beatrice yet of that quality in Beatrice, the particular glorious Beatrician quality.⁵⁴

What then? Nothing; a particular phenomenon has disappeared. It is for us to decide whether its disappearance makes nonsense of its first appearance.⁵⁵

This is the dreadful moment in romantic love. It is the moment of the death of the Mother of love. Mrs. Shideler names it the 'negative romantic' moment, and she compares its dimensions to what Kierkegaard called 'angst' or dread and Tillich 'the abyss' and psychiatrists 'anxiety' and finds it to be equivalent.⁵⁶ I don't think that it is equivalent, but it certainly bears some resemblances, and in any case, the moment is generally considered 'awful' which is all that need be said about it.

Pseudo-romanticism has sometimes felt that suicide is the only proper and honorable response to this moment, and if not proper and honorable, at least desirable. Love has died, there is nothing else to live for. It is a common heresy, but allowing that, a heresy nevertheless.

53. Williams, Beatrice, pp. 34-35.

54. Ibid., p. 35.

55. Ibid., p. 36.

56. Shideler, op. cit., p. 34.

In proper romanticism "the appearance of the glory is temporary; the authority of the glory towards pure love is everlasting; and the quality of the glory is eternal, such as the heavens have in Christ."⁵⁷ In keeping with his practice of constructing a theology of romantic love, Williams relates this experience to Christianity. The glory

...is eternal but is not everlastingly visible, any more than the earthly life of Christ. Its quality may deceive hasty imagination, and it may be expected to return quickly as was Christ by the Church. It may not. Its authority remains unimpaired.⁵⁸

Elsewhere he relates it to the life of 'the Divine Thing.'

To speak again in the terms of Romantic Theology, this disappearance of the Beatrician quality is not in correspondence with the death of our Lord, but rather with the beginning of his public ministry. The wonders of the birth and the hiddenness of the childhood are done. Love must, in every sense, be about his father's business. The real work of conversion is about to begin.⁵⁹

That lovers fall out of love and that love dies in no way invalidates the experience itself. Nor does it mean that the original revelation and the original conversion are false. We can be false to both by assuming so. If we do not, they will not prove false. Williams has Anthony in The Place of the Lion suddenly come to see the proper significance of these moments.

57. Williams, He Came Down, p. 79.

58. Ibid.

59. Williams, Beatrice, p. 38.

Though they did not last, their importance did; though any friendship might be shattered, no strife and no separation could deny the truth within it: all immortality could not more clearly reveal what in these moments had been.⁶⁰

So much then, for the first heresy. The second heresy, "the assumption that this love is personal," has already been touched upon. This heresy usually takes two forms: "(1) that it is the personal adornment of the beloved; and (2) that it belongs personally to the lover."⁶¹ The first is nothing other than idolatry. It is thinking that the beloved is the actual glory, the actual love to which she points. It is to confuse the beloved with her referent. This heresy is possible both in and out of marriage. The second type of this heresy is perhaps more common within marriage than without. This heresy makes the lover a jealous lover. Williams explained it "as a desire to retain the glory for oneself, which means that one is not adoring the glory but only one's relation to the glory."⁶² It is quite easy to distinguish in a love relationship when the lover is concerned and when he is not concerned - when he no longer cares for the beloved. The church has always seen this concern as a duty, as likewise it has denounced unconcern and its

60. Williams, The Place of the Lion, p. 182.

61. Williams, He Came Down, p. 79.

62. Ibid., p. 80.

result, divorce, as a sin. It certainly reeks of sin, but there are others possible in this relationship. While it is easy to distinguish concern and unconcern, it is not so easy to distinguish between loving concern and jealousy. Williams felt, and he is no doubt right in this, "that we might be a little nearer, intellectually, to pure love if jealousy had been as passionately denounced as divorce in the Christian Church."⁶³

The third heresy, the assumption that this love is sufficient, is more common than the other two. The Beatrician moment, the first moment of romantic love, is what might be called a Divine nudge. Glory is everywhere manifested but the glory cannot be captured or sustained. The moment is more, perhaps than a nudge. It is a stiff shove. It is, in a certain way, analogous to the moment of repentance. There is a turning-about or around, but there is only one moment in which we turn. To keep on walking once we have turned is not so glorious as the motion of turning itself. The heresy here, as in repentance, is in attempting to hold to the original moment of turning. The result of this heresy is, naturally enough, to keep walking in circles. It is, in a small way, 'sinning that grace may abound.' Williams, as usual, describes it best:

63. Ibid.

A kind of Calvinism seizes the emotions; the heart has recognized the attributed perfection and stops there. It feels as if of the elect, and it goes on feeling that till it ceases to feel anything.⁶⁴

If the original Beatrician moment is not willed, if the will is possessed or overcome, it is not so in the second moment. Having been nudged, the will must take over. The will must sustain the original impetus communicated to the soul. The lover must will to be what he has seen when the original glory has faded. Mary in Seed of Adam describes the situation and asks the question which must be asked, and must be answered correctly if romanticism is not to be perverted.

Mary: The glory is eternal, and not I,
and I am only one diagram of the glory:
will you believe in me or in the glory?⁶⁵

At every point in the romantic experience Williams stressed the role of the intellect. "Proper Romanticism," he wrote, "neither denies nor conceals; neither fears nor flies. It desires only accuracy; 'look, look; attend!'"⁶⁶ This intellectual accuracy distinguishes more than any other feature, proper romanticism from pseudo- or soft headed romanticism. This accuracy maintains the distinction between the beloved and the glory; between love and the lovers; between what is imaged and what the lover would

64. Ibid.

65. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 81.

66. Williams, Beatrice, p. 35.

have imaged. The experience of Romantic love can only be moral if it is accurate. The morality of the image, the morality of romantic love, is to see clearly the images in their own right.⁶⁷ Every man is created for a purpose, each has a function and in romantic love or any love the function is to present love and therefore Christ to others. We must know the images "as God knows them in their union with him."⁶⁸

Any full scale analysis and appraisal of Williams's theology of Romantic Love would require more time and research than the limited nature of this paper allows. A few general comments seem in order, however.

Perhaps the first impression one gets when comparing Williams's novels and his theology of Romantic Love is that, for all his claims, he seems to be guilty of gilding eroticism. While professing to investigate a love which includes within it a good deal of eroticism, of both the sensual and heavenly types, the lovers in his novels appear to be only good and gentle friends. His idea that to be in love is to be in love in general is an obvious example of this. There is not one of us, I think, who after some consideration would not feel that Mary's comments to Joseph in Seed of Adam are either flip, insincere,

67. of. Ibid., p. 15.

68. Ibid., p. 146.

or unauthentic: in short, that Mary has missed the point. Likewise, a discussion in The Greater Trumps between Nancy and Sybil seems similarly unauthentic or unrealistic. All we need know about the characters for our purpose is that Sybil is Nancy's aunt and Nancy is in love with Henry. Nancy speaks first,

"I'm not all that selfish, am I?"

"I don't think you're particularly selfish," her Aunt said, "only you don't love anyone."

Nancy looked up, more bewildered than angry. "Don't love?" she said. "I love you and Father and Ralph very much indeed."

"And Henry?" Sybil asked.

"Well - Henry," Nancy said, blushing a little, "is different."

"Alas!" Sybil murmured, but the lament was touched with laughter.

"What do you mean - 'alas'?" Nancy asked. "Aunt Sybil, do you want me to feel about everybody as I do about Henry?"

"A little adjustment here and there," Sybil said, "a retinting perhaps, but otherwise - why, yes! Don't you think so?"

"Even, I suppose," Nancy said, "to Henry's great-aunt or whatever she was?" But the words died from a soft sarcasm to a softer doubt: the very framing of the question, as so often happens, was itself an answer. 'Her body thought'; interrogation purged emotion, and the purified emotion replied to the interrogation. To love....

"But I can't," she exclaimed, "turn all this" - she laid her hand on her heart - "towards everybody. It can't be done; it only lives for - him."

"Nor even then," Sybil said. "It lives for and in itself. You can only give it back to itself."

Nancy brooded. After a while, "I still don't see how I can love Joanna with it," she said.

"If you give it back to itself," Sybil said, "wholly and utterly, it will do all that for you. You've no idea what a lot it can do. I think you might find it worth trying." 69

It must be asked if Williams has not, in attempting to redefine them, ~~not~~ eliminated certain characteristic essentials from romanticism and romantic love. Has his understanding of existence and mankind as symbolic not allowed him to overcome the difficulties theology has always felt to exist in romantic love, too easily? And if this allows him to make Eros more like Agape does it not, by the same method, make agape more like eros? That is, does his conception of neighbor love not tend toward loving the divine in another person? If his theology of Romantic love tends to blur the distinctions between these traditional types of love, the radical distinctions made between them in our day by Nygren seems to obscure their relatedness. It is precisely Williams's point that agape and eros can neither be confused nor separated. "Eros", he wrote, "is often our salvation from a false agape, as agape is from tyrannical eros. Redemption is everywhere exchanged."⁷⁰ Williams thought that they, like everything else in and out of this world, co-inherited.

Williams was, with his theology, trying to break out of the rigidity of Nygren's definitions. Nygren, carefully demonstrating the insidious influences of Hellenic and Hellenistic conceptions of eros on agape, has at the same

70. Williams, Beatrice. p. 182.

time implicitly consecrated a certain Latin contribution. Whenever Nygren encounters that airy "upward tendency" he gives forth with a platonic sneeze. His nose is not so sensitive when he encounters the latin conception of the will. Nygren is not perhaps so guilty of this as those who use his study as a basis for delineating Christian love. They have a tendency to take over a conception of the will which seems unrealistic, or perhaps untrue. To caricature an incredibly complex phenomenon, I shall say that western theology inherited from the Latins a legal conception of the will. Whether this legal conception of the will grew out of the great interest in law and ordered society or whether the great interest in law grew out originally from this conception of the will I shall not venture to answer. Nevertheless, an idea of the will as an autonomous constituent of the human personality seems to be present in latin thought. Consequently a whole legal and perhaps legalistic strain is apparent in latin culture. An emphasis is placed on duty. This can be seen in the Aeneid, and in one sense latin and Roman life came to be understood in terms of the choice between Dido or duty. It was not a choice which could in theory produce much creative thought about our relations with Dido. The radical emphasis on the human will can be seen in that recurring phenomenon, latin sectarianism and in the latin

theologians. A certain legal strain is apparent from the start in Tertullian and then in Augustine and Anselm. Even Luther and Calvin did not manage to escape it.

This legal conception of the will is apparent today and especially apparent in discussion of agape. Christian love is a matter not of affection, but rather a matter of will.⁷¹ It is commanded. It is a law. For someone like Kierkegaard the very fact that this love was a commanded activity made it entirely new; made it, in fact, Christian. "Love also existed in heathendom; but the idea that love is a duty is an everlasting innovation - and everything has become new."⁷² The result of this emphasis can be seen in most any book on Christian ethics. We read that "Love of neighbor like this is wholly different from 'erotic' love. In love of the latter kind, the self is relatively passive; it reacts to an external stimulus, as shown by phrases such as 'falling in love,' being swept off one's feet,' and 'smitten with love.'"⁷³ And then, "Its radical difference from all of these forms of 'natural' love is due to the fact that it is based, not upon natural impulse, feeling, or interest of any kind, but upon imitation of

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- 71. For one discussion cf. R. C. Mortimer, The Elements of Moral Theology. Adam & Charles Blac, 1947, p.138
 - 72. Kierkegaard, Works of Love, trans. by D.F. Swenson and L. M. Swenson, Princeton Univ. Press, 1946 p. 20.
 - 73. George Thomas, Christian Ethics And Moral Philosophy Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, p. 52.

the perfect love of God."⁷⁴ It is, of course, common to suggest that the natural will cannot do this alone but needs divine assistance. It remains, we are told, a matter of the will nevertheless.

The common fault of this tradition has been that it can make little or no sense out of romantic love and marriage. At its worst it has tolerated romantic love and marriage for some - not certainly for those who would be perfect - and at best it has recommended marriage for procreation, as a remedy for fornication, and as a union symbolic of that between Christ and his church. The last reason has always caused considerable embarrassment and it might be said that those who familiarized themselves most with the dimensions of agape have tended to be the greatest spiritualizers of the marriage union.

Williams's purpose was not to redefine Christian love, but to construct a theology of romantic love. The redefinition, or the blurring of agape and eros, indicates perhaps that they have been distinguished too sharply. D. S. Bailey, in his book, The Mystery of Love and Marriage, feels the need to do some similar redefining, and it is certainly in line with Williams's efforts. He feels that there has been a cleavage between theology and romantic love, and that

74. Ibid., p. 53.

the cleavage still remains. The purpose of his book is to "suggest some ways in which the problem may be approached, and to put forward a reinterpretation of love and marriage."⁷⁵

It is not without significance that in his section on "Love" he quotes extensively from Charles Williams.⁷⁶

75. D. S. Bailey, The Mystery of Love and Marriage, Harper & Bros., 1952.

76. Ibid., p. 14 ff.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORKS OF LOVE

Williams's terms for the works of love are derivation, exchange, interchange, bearing burdens, substitution and forgiveness. All the terms are interrelated and point toward a common operation. Derivation is the name given to those operations in which we acknowledge our dependence on, and derivation from, others in thought, word and deed and existence. The use of a source footnote in a learned work would be one point in this operation. Exchange is the name given to those operations of mutuality - those operations in which we give and take to and from others. Interchange seems to be merely a synonym of exchange. Substitution refers to those operations of life in which we do something on behalf or for someone else, or in their place. Bearing burdens is a substitution of a particular kind. We carry someone else's burden for them. Forgiveness is more specifically a bearing of the consequences of another's sin, and a renewal of the love relationship.

The single basic operation to which all these terms point is expressed best by substitution or substituted

love. In this chapter I hope to define this operation, relate it to the preceding chapters of this essay and exhibit its centrality in the theology of Charles Williams.

Robert McAfee Brown considers the practice of substituted love "the most important single concept for Williams" and suggests that "It means, to be very pedestrian, that we must continually help each other."¹ Brown is right on both points, but on the second he is perhaps not pedestrian enough. Williams was more pedestrian. He related the practice of substituted love to lending a book,² carrying a bag,³ and to the practice of the Scilly Islanders of doing one another's washing.⁴ Substitution, it will be shown, refers to the most ordinary and the most divine matters.

Substitution, as Williams came to understand it, became the central ethical principle in his theology, and it was defined out of the central religious principle, co-inherence. A simpler description might be that substitution is the operational or functional definition of the principle of which co-inherence is the essential definition. Like co-inherence, substitution has been at the root of all I have been describing in the previous

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1. Robert McAfee Brown, op. cit., p. 220.
 2. Williams, He Came Down, p. 87.
 3. Williams, Hell, p. 189.
 4. Ibid., p. 108.

chapters. The Trinity exists in a state of co-inherence and its characteristic activity is substitution. The Creation is in the image of the co-inherence and therefore its activities and the activities of its creatures are substitution. The Fall points to nothing else than the unwillingness to co-inhere: the refusal to live in a world in which substitution is the basic activity of life. The good is hard, and God is terrible, because we have chosen to see the acts of substitution which nurture life as parasites which drain life away. The coming of the Christ is the coming of him who substitutes his manhood for ours on the Cross. The Way of Affirmation and the Way of Romantic Love are founded on the principle of the Incarnation, and suppose that since God allowed himself to derive from his Creation and from his creatures the possibility of such derivation exists always and in all places.

God's substitution and our substitutions, Williams thought, were the only realities which justified creation. I will begin my analysis of substitution with the creation which needs justifying.

The Human Condition

Rousseau began his celebrated Social Contract with the observation that 'Man was born free, but is everywhere

in bondage.'⁵ Williams made a similar observation: "We are always in the condition that we are because of others."⁶ And he proceeds to imply that the condition we are in is usually not particularly pleasant. Life is for most people unfair and often obscene. And the unfairness and obscenity are more often than not because of others: because of neighbors, wives, children, governments, employers. Every human relationship contains the seeds of sorrow and misfortune. Blood is shed here for riches there; this man lives from that man; the employer lives by the sweat and blood of his employees. The hunger of humanity for independence, power, virtue and autonomy is everywhere frustrated. No matter where or in what position we find ourselves, we find ourselves dependent. Even Rousseau's observation that we are born free is false. We are conceived by others who haven't consulted our wishes, (the absurdity of this points up the truth it expresses) and for nine months we are completely and wholly dependent on our mothers- we live only in and through them. We owe our very existence to the inclinations of others, and this continues even after we are born.

But we know what we want. We want a chance to express

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5. Rousseau, The Social Contract, trans. by Willmoore Kendall, Henry Regnery Co., 1954, p. 2.
 6. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 122.

ourselves, a chance to determine our natures and our destinies. Freedom is felt to be the necessary prerequisite for developing our virtues and our personalities and for shaping our destinies. We settle on toleration. We wish, we say, to live and let live. We make mutual pacts not to be mutual - that's in part what tolerance is. We find, however, that it is frequently not possible to live and let live. Our living, we find, kills others, and those we let live often kill us.

If we bring God into our considerations of the obscenity of existence, a further horror grasps us. God has made all this, and often he seems not only to tolerate the obscenities of life but to encourage them. God seems to encourage and contribute to the unfairness of existence. One of Williams's favorite examples of this had to do with the sons of Adam. Cain prepared his sacrifice and the fire struck on his brother's altar;⁷ a radically unfair piece of divine business. The prophets questioned the Lord about this unfairness: Why do the ways of the wicked prosper? And consider the Lord's servant Job. No matter what was restored to him in the end, his situation was horrible. God seems to be involved in all this horror; the source of evil itself seems to be in the Unnameable.

7. Williams, He Came Down, p. 25.

That 'we are always in the condition that we are because of others' is a basic fact. "This is all so elementary," writes Williams, "as to sound stupid."⁸ And so it is. But he goes on to state the crucial problem: "Yet to accept this profoundly is difficult."⁹ We know the facts of existence, now what are we to do about them? Shall we, as Job's wife suggests, "Curse God and die?" Probably he wouldn't oblige us with our death even if we did. Or shall we, like Cain, rhetorically ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The justification of our obscene existence and God's part in it lies in God's answer to Cain's question. Although Cain was not seeking an answer - but only engaging in the motions of self-justification, God answered his question in the Covenant with Noah: 'At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.' The answer grows progressively more clear throughout the history of Israel until it is fully answered and sealed in the divine down-coming of God in Christ. Christ revealed to us the heavenly pattern - the pattern of life and the only pattern of life.

Williams's great discovery was that the heavenly pattern was also to be the earthly pattern. To put this

8. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 122.

9. Ibid., pp. 122-123.

more simply, he discovered the interrelatedness of carrying a bag and the divine life of the Holy Trinity.

The Heavenly Pattern

When the Christian Church felt it necessary to explain who God was, it was led to posit a Trinity. It was early discovered that this Trinity could not be defined in one breath, so to speak. The church further discovered that those who did define the existence of the Trinity very sharply or clearly, defined it poorly and in several cases wrongly; that is heretically. The Trinity seemed so elusive, so slippery, so much in motion that some suspected that the Trinitarian direction of definition was erroneous. These doubters felt that God was only God and that he was one and only one. The Trinitarians naturally agreed but said that this one God was somehow in motion with himself, and that he curiously exhibited a certain undefineable but perceptible threeness. And then it was discovered that the very elusiveness of the Trinity pointed to a great reality. At that time the church discovered that its elusiveness pointed to a fact about the existence of the Alone; "it mutually co-inheres by its own nature."¹⁰ The Trinity, it was discovered, exists in a state of co-inherence.

10. Williams, Dove, p. 235.

The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and the Spirit is in both. The life of God, it came to be seen, was a shared activity. The basis of reality, the very existence of God was somehow revealed to be, not individual, but communal or both. As someone observed (maliciously, of course) in clinical training, the Trinity is the original small group. Malicious or not, Williams for one would have been pleased with the definition, and would have been quick to point out that small groups have dynamics. The Trinity is no exception. Its state of existence is co-inherence, and its dynamics are nothing else than substitution. The Father shares in the life of the Son, and so forth, and he shares so completely in the life of the Son that it is revealed to us that He is in the Son. Furthermore, it was revealed that this co-inherence presented neither for the Father nor the Son any identity problem. The Father and the Son co-inhere, yet they each exist in their own right. The persons of the Trinity exist for and in one another. Williams felt that this manner of existence was precisely what made God personal, and that it was only this living for and in others which could make a person out of a man.

The manner of the existence of Trinity was most fully exhibited in Christ. Christ revealed to us the life of the Trinity in his teachings, but more than that, he lived

on earth the life of the Trinity. He could do not other - God must always be God whether at home or abroad. The pattern of exchange and substitution are fully revealed in Christ. He let himself be derived from his creatures, he became 'hereditary' as Williams liked to say. In his death "He gave his life 'for', that is, instead of and on behalf of - ours. In that sense He lives in us and we in Him, He and we co-inhere."¹¹ Christ came proclaiming a mystery and this mystery was substitution; its other name is love.

When those standing around the Cross pointed out in ridicule that 'He saved others; himself he cannot save', they were perfectly correct and had in fact, put their finger on the first principle of life in the Kingdom. "It was a definition as precise as any in the works of the medieval schoolmen."¹² The taunt was "an exact definition of the Kingdom of heaven in operation, and of the great discovery of substitution which was then made by earth."¹³ It was also a precise definition of the life of the Trinity.

Christ's central substitution on the Cross for us men revealed the terrifying otherness of life itself. It defined the nature of life and the nature of love. His

11. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 129.

12. Williams, He Came Down, p. 83.

13. Ibid., p. 83.

life and death and resurrection were to be the new definition of love. The nature of love exhibited in Christ's coming was this: "To love is to die and live again; to live from a new root."¹⁴ Life is no longer to be living from ourselves or for ourselves. The only life that is to be life at all is to be the life of love.

We are to love each other as he loved us, laying down our lives as he did, that this love may be perfected. We are to love each other, that is, by acts of substitution. We are to be substituted and to bear substitution. All life is to be vicarious - at least, all life in the Kingdom of heaven is to be vicarious.¹⁵

The pattern of Christ is the pattern of life, the pattern of love. It is this pattern which is the new in Christianity. That all life is to be vicarious was neither in the law nor in the prophets.¹⁶ The Greek philosophers knew nothing of this excellent absurdity. Plato had been hard put to explain why one of the enlightened brethren should return to the cave where men were living in shadows and among apparitions which they assumed to be the real. Even if he justified such a return he never dreamed that the escape from the shadows was by and through others.

Christ came into the hard good of life and revealed that it was the only good of life. He came down into the

14. Ibid., p. 86.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

human condition in which "we are always in the condition that we are because of others" and revealed to us that this condition was exactly the first principle of the Kingdom of heaven. He could not save himself, nor can we save ourselves. The Kingdom is gained only by attention to others. Christ's weakness was precisely his strength, his death precisely the way to the new life. His coming reveals the centrality of substitution - in the divine life and in our lives. "The method of the new life which Messiah (he said) came to give so abundantly begins with substitution and proceeds by substitution."¹⁷

Christ's coming reveals that the unfairness we see in existence is, seen with the eyes of faith, the glory of existence. All that Williams has said about the unfairness of creation and life must be understood in the light of the redemptive work of Christ. Tucked away in his essay on the Cross is the solution to life's unfairness. "We are, by that august sacrifice, compelled to concede to Him the propriety of our creation. I do not know that anything greater could be demanded or done."¹⁸

The life and central substitution of Christ did more than reveal a principle for life. Somehow, and it remains a mystery, all our substitutions relate to Christ's central

17. Ibid., p. 93.

18. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 103.

substitution. In the exchanges and substitutions we make it is Christ in us who sustains us and makes the substitution. "It is I yet not I but Christ who liveth in me." Williams recalled the story of a Carthaginian slave who "in a sentence defined the Faith" to illustrate this point.

"Her name was Felicitas; she was Carthaginian; she lay in prison; there she bore a child. In her pain she screamed. The jailers asked her how, if she shrieked at that, she expected to endure death by the beasts. She said: 'Now I suffer what I suffer; then another will be in me who will suffer for me, as I shall suffer for him.'" ¹⁹

Only because Christ has substituted himself for us can we in turn substitute ourselves for others. "Fool," cries out one of Williams's characters in The Place of the Lion, "there's only one sacrifice, and the God of gods makes it, not you."²⁰ In All Hallows' Eve the relation of a human substitution to the central substitution is presented with 'great imaginative power.'²¹ Betty has been put under Simon's power; Simon intends by means of the backward intoned Tetragrammaton, to separate her body and soul and to send the soul into the supernatural world where she can be of great use to his plans. Lester, a dead girl existing in a purgatorial state, merely by

19. Williams, Dove, p. 28.

20. Williams, The Place of the Lion, p. 145.

21. Ridler, op. cit., p. xlvii.

being with Betty and being of goodwill towards her, absorbs the effect of the reversed Tetragrammaton herself. Lester finds a bluish-green tinge of deathlight threatening to draw her into the nothingness of evil. But she also found that "She was leaning back on something, some frame which from her buttocks to her head supported her; indeed she could have believed, but she was not sure, that her arms, flung out on each side held on to a part of the frame, as along a beam of wood."²² The imagery of the Cross serves to convey Williams's point. Lester is lying on the Cross (it supports her) but she is also standing (she supports it). Christ's substitution supports and maintains us and our substitution, but somehow also, our substitutions maintain and spread his substitution. The knowledge of this preserves us from a foolish religious arrogance and maintains us in the humility necessary for a life of love.

The First Principle of Nature and Grace

To make explicit what has been in this discussion implicit, for Williams, substitution is the first principle of nature and grace. He answers affirmatively Cranmer's questions to the skeleton:

"Can life itself be redemption? all grace but grace?
all this terror the agonizing glory of grace?"²³

22. Williams, Eve, pp. 143-144.

23. Williams, Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, p. 69.

If nature and grace are different they are only different in power. Grace is more potent in its operation than nature but they are both parts in the same operation. In Williams's theology Creation and redemption radically co-inhere.

This principle leads us to this: as in Heaven so on earth. The heavenly patterns displayed by Christ reveal the patterns which must be on earth also.

The central mystery of Christendom, the terrible fundamental substitution on which so much learning had been spent and about which so much blood had been shed, showed not as a miraculous exception, but as the root of a universal rule... 'behold I show you a mystery! as supernatural as that sacrifice, as natural as carrying a bag.²⁴

Williams, more than most theologians, sought out the natural imagery of grace. His novels often seem bizarre because he was able to comprehend the principles of the most diverse phenomena, from the outstretched arm of a policeman to the very harmony and justice of creation. It should be readily granted that not many theologians have seen much relationship between carrying a bag and the central sacrifice of Christ.

The experience of lovers gave him examples of this life of substitution and co-inherence. "There is some

24. Williams, Hell, p. 189.

kind of experience which can only be expressed by saying: 'Love you? I am you.'"²⁵ The force in a love affair is centripetal. The lovers tend toward a common center. Their lives become hopelessly intermingled. They live in and through one another. They are becoming one. And that's what the New Testament said they should become.

There is a natural phenomenon which images more fully than a love affair the nature of co-inherence and substitution childbirth.

A man can have no child unless his seed is received and carried by a woman; a woman can have no child unless she receives and carries the seed of a man - literally bearing the burden. It is not only a mutual act; it is a mutual act of substitution. The child itself for nine months literally co-inheres in its mother; there is no human creature that has not sprung from such a period of such an interior growth.²⁶

Childbirth is perhaps the richest natural image of the operations of co-inherence and substitution. Each parent must give himself to the other. They substitute one for another and both substitute for the child. ~~In short,~~ Their substitutions produce new life. The woman must carry this life within her for nine months. The life and she co-inhere. It is a rich image of the operations of both nature and grace. "From childbirth to the Divine Trinity

25. Williams, Beatrice, p. 204.

26. Williams, Dove, p. 234.

Itself the single nature thrives; there is here no difference between that natural and that supernatural."²⁷ And again, "From childbirth to those... 'adult in love', there is but one Nature. That Nature is not divided from grace; it is indeed (let it be said with submission to the theologians) the nature of grace. The difference, in that sense, is only a difference of power."²⁸

The operations of childbirth are also seen in Baptism. We co-inhere with our mothers and we also co-inhere with the ancient guilt of the race. We are born in sin. In Baptism our lives are sealed by the formula of co-inherence and substitution. Our godparents substitute themselves and their faith for ours.²⁹ Our faith for several years is their faith, our life in their lives and in the life of the church. Seen only with the eyes of fallen mankind, we are born free (we use the word advisedly) and at Baptism we are put into a new bondage: someone else speaks for us, we are grafted into a community, we become part of a mission, and we are thereafter responsible for all men. This bondage is of course the bondage of the new life, and it is the bondage of the vicarious life of the Kingdom.

There are also natural relationships which in part reveal that this way of substitution, this losing of life for the gaining of life is not so absurd as it seems when

27. Williams, Selected Writings

28. Ibid., p.127.

29. cf. Williams, Dove, p. 234.

we first encounter the demand for it in the Gospel. The lovers, of course, know in part the bestowal of life which comes from the losing of life for the other. The life of a family images the life, which is greater than the sum of the lives of the individual members of the family, which results from living for others. Each in its own way proves that when Christ came promising life, he meant what he said.

Common observation of the natural world reveals also that this bondage of living for others is only apparent bondage. This living for others stifles our self-development? our quest for virtue? the formation of our destiny? Williams, as many theologians³⁰ and psychologists before and after him, felt that the contrary was true.

No such substitution accents the individual less; on the contrary, it is, for most, the strongest life of the individual. Even in the kingdom of this world those are greatest who (rightly or wrongly) have assessed to them the desires, wills, lives of others, when Ceasar was Rome and Napoleon was France. It is the touch of impersonality in Ceasar, the hint that he had in his own strange way denied the self and become only Ceasar even to himself that makes him so fascinating.³¹

The Fall obscured the significance of these natural

30. William Temple says it precisely: "As has been already pointed out, greatness of individuality does not consist in independence of environment, but rather in responsiveness to an unusually large and rich environment." Christus Veritas, p. 68.

31. Williams, He Came Down, p. 93.

operations, but it did not cancel completely the joy of new life which comes about in love and childbirth and greatness. What the Fall did was in fact limit our perception of joy. Joy was to be universal because our substitutions and co-inherences were to be universal. After the Fall and in our sin we related these joys only to ourselves and in a limited way. We particularized, we divided, we perceived friends and enemies, we mistook our natural loves for reality, never guessing that this natural love we had for a few was the faint trace of a universal reality lost. In the New Testament the full principle is defined³² and a universal response is demanded.

Substitution and Sacrifice

It should be obvious by now that by 'substitution' Williams means 'sacrifice' and by 'substituted love' he means 'sacrificial love.' Why Williams chose to use substitution and substituted love rather than sacrifice and sacrificial love, he does not tell us. One reason is perhaps that the word sacrifice has fallen among thieves who have subdued it and robbed it of its meaning. The robbers are not only the merchants and salesmen but the pious. The word sacrifice carries now the connotation

32. Ibid., p. 87.

of doing something distasteful. It only indicates how far we have fallen when we suppose that all sacrifice is distasteful. And the word seems now to refer to something we ourselves do for someone else. It has lost the mutuality which should be a principal part of its meaning. It tends to mean doing something for someone which is unusual or eccentric or not necessary.

The word substitution is a more humble and in that sense a better word. Few would mind being known as great sacrificers, but how many would be pleased to be known as great substitutes? The word substitute never loses sight of the other in its definition. We substitute for someone else and the someone else is the primary reference. The word substitution embraces a greater diversity of events and relationships which the word sacrifice, because of its narrowly 'religious' connotations, can no longer embrace. Substitution is perhaps the better word for one who believes in the Way of Affirmation and who sees no essential difference between nature and grace.

If it is clear that substitution is Williams's word for sacrifice, then a further point is clear: Williams and William Temple agree on the nature of Reality. Temple, in a discussion of the atonement, writes, "What, however, does this tell us concerning the Nature of the Supreme Spirit? It tells us that sacrifice is the root principle

of Reality because it is the characteristic activity of God."³³

The Practice of Substituted Love

In the early 1930's Williams came more and more to see how we could participate in the root principle of Reality. He found what he thought to be the key activity of life in the co-inherence in Galatians 6:2 - 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.' The passage took on a deeper meaning; he began to suspect that it was literally true. In a letter of 1930 he wrote,

I have a point to discuss with you: which has made me wonder whether the New Testament may not be merely true in some of its advice. All about 'bearing one another's burdens.' I have an awful (full of awe) feeling that one can. The older I get the more amazed I become at the pure convenience of - what we call love. It is not merely beautiful; it is useful which of course, it said it was all along.³⁴

And in 1933 the advice of the Apostle became even more central to his thought.

Rest content about substituted love. None of us know - yet. After all, we only discovered it as an experiential fact, by chance, as it were; and I'm terrified out of my senses at the idea of going further. But even to carry what we know - what we have chosen to believe - a little steadily in the world; mentioning it now and then, if it seems desirable; and proposing it if there seems an opportunity...merely to do that might almost make us 'justified in our existence.'³⁵

33. Temple, Christus Veritas, p. 272.

34. quoted by Hadfield, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

35. quoted by Ridler, op. cit., p. xlviii.

Williams suspected that the phrase 'bear ye one another's burdens' meant much more than was generally allowed.

Bearing one another's burdens he thought was commonly understood to refer only to sympathetic concern or exterior acts of kindness and love;³⁶ and that while it was considered a nice thing, it really didn't help or count for much in the end. Williams took this piece of Pauline advice and made it a principle of universal exchange.

Bearing burdens was to become a way of life. It was no longer to be a nice gesture but the way people live and love together. It was to be the only proper way of losing oneself. Its principle was precisely the loss of life for the gaining of life. And its commonly understood limitations were false. The nature of the burdens we are able to bear is unlimited. We are to bear exterior burdens as we have always supposed the phrase to recommend, but we are to bear interior burdens also. This substitution is to be practiced "by bearing one another's burdens interiorly as well as exteriorly; by the turning of the general sympathy into something of immediate use; by a compact of substitution."³⁷ We are to bear one another's fears, griefs and anxieties³⁸ by making compacts for taking them

36. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 127.

37. Ibid.

38. Williams, He Came Down, p. 88.

over. The operation is no less simple and no different in principle from carrying a parcel for someone else. "A man ceases to worry about X because his friend has agreed to be worried by X."³⁹ This principle of exchange is obvious in the physical world. Its possibilities are greater in the mental and spiritual worlds.⁴⁰ The monks of the Thebaid expressed this bearing of burdens best.

A certain old man used to say, "It is right for a man to take up the burden for those who are akin (or near) to him, whatsoever it may be, and, so to speak, to put his own soul in the place of that of his neighbour, and to become, if it were possible, a double man; and he must suffer, and weep and mourn with him, and finally the matter must be accounted by him as if he himself had put on the actual body of his neighbour, and as if he had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must suffer for him as he would for himself."⁴¹

This substitution, this exchange, this bearing of burdens is not to be limited by time or space, as Descent Into Hell makes clear. "The past and the future are subject to interchange, as the present with both, the dead with the living, the living with the dead."⁴² It is even possible to bear physical burdens - burdens of injuries, paralysis, sickness, but here it is not so obvious that it can be done. Williams grants that "the body is probably the last place where such interchange is possible"⁴³ but

39. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 128.

40. Ibid., p. 126.

41. quoted by Williams, Ibid., p. 127.

42. Williams, He Came Down, p. 92.

43. Ibid., p. 90.

it remains a possibility. Williams seems to have ruled out the possibility of bearing the burden of another's sin in Descent Into Hell⁴⁴ but later in his introduction to Evelyn Underhill's letters he said that she had corrected this opinion.⁴⁵

The actual practice of bearing burdens requires little more than good sense; it requires only "the first faint motions of faith."⁴⁶ Descent Into Hell shows the proper method.⁴⁷ It requires no more than two people. The burden is defined; one agrees to carry it, the other agrees to let it be carried. In the case of Pauline Arstruther, her burden was the fear of meeting her doppelgänger and the panic when she did meet it. The burden is the fear and the panic, not the doppelgänger itself. Peter Stanhope contracts with her to bear the fear and the panic. Pauline's part in the contract is to allow and to remember that Peter Stanhope has agreed to undergo the fear and the panic for her. Pauline must still face the doppelgänger but as one who has the burdens of her fear and panic carried by another. Pauline's is 'to remember that (she) has parted with (her) burden, that it is being carried by another, that (her) part is to believe that and be at peace.'⁴⁸ Stanhope's

45. Shideler, op. cit., p. 155.

46. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 148.

47. cf. Williams, Hell, p. 96 ff.

48. Williams, He Came Down, p. 89.

part is "to set himself - mind and emotion and sensation to the burden, to know it, imagine it, receive it - and sometimes not to be taken aback by the swiftness of the divine grace and the lightness of the burden."⁴⁹

The fruit of bearing burdens is reconciliation: reconciliation with oneself, with one's neighbor and with the unfairness of existence and therefore with God. We discover in our bearing of burdens that what we presumed to be the unfairness of existence is the way to reconciliation with existence. "It is not till the cross has been lifted that it can be a burden. It is in the exchange of burdens they they become light."⁵⁰ The bearing of burdens is no cheap grace. The fundamental principle holds: where there is no death there is no resurrection. The operation of bearing burdens tends to produce in us the proper humility necessary for life. If others are carrying our burdens for us, if our lives "so depend upon others it becomes impossible to think very highly of them."⁵¹ The operation of bearing tends to restore our vision of the co-inherence of mankind. In bearing the burdens of others and having our burdens borne by others we begin to see the great interrelatedness of all mankind and creation. We begin to preceive not objects but the great living pattern of

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., p. 88.

51. Williams, Selected Writings, p. 129.

of mankind. We tend to become one with our neighbor and with mankind. Its result is more than an active sympathy, it is a unity. Williams describes this new state of 'loving from within' in concepts reminiscent of Buber's I-thou relationship.

One no longer merely loves an object; one has a sense of loving precisely from the great web in which the object and we are both combined. There is, if only transitorily, a flicker of living within the beloved.⁵²

The vicariousness of life, this living for others is to last to the end. There is to be no trick ending to life in which all that we lost is restored, all that we gave to others returned twofold. Life begins in the other, life must end in the other. Christ told us this: 'one soweth and another reapeth.' That is the glory of life; we sow, another reaps, and yet another eats. All life is an exchange. It is, in fact, in the 'koinonia' of the kingdom that exchange is most fully operative.

This man's patience shall adorn that man, and that man's celerity this; and magnificence and thrift exchanged; and chastity and generosity; and tenderness and truth, and so on through the kingdom. We shall be graced by one and by all, only never by ourselves; the only thing that can be ours is the fiery blush of the laughter of humility when the shame of Adam has become the shyness of the saints.⁵³

52. Ibid.

53. Williams, He Came Down, pp. 93-94.

In the postscript to the Descent of the Dove Williams suggests that an order of the co-inherence might be formed within the church to communicate an increased awareness of co-inherence by substitution, exchange and bearing burdens.⁵⁴ In the Forgiveness of Sins he hints at the duties of such an order in the ideal Christian state. He wonders whether a guild could ever be produced which would bear the legal penalties for confessed criminals, even perhaps the death penalty itself. It is a dream, of course.

Yet only by operations that once seemed no less of dreams has the church reached its own present self-consciousness - by devotions not dissimilar, powers not otherwise practised. We do well to dream such things as long as our dreams are in accord with the great Christian vision.⁵⁵

Forgiveness

Charles Williams devoted a long essay to the forgiveness of sins. I will here touch on only a few of the central motifs in his understanding of pardon and, in particular, on those which relate forgiveness and the bearing of burdens. Forgiveness or pardon (Williams seems to have preferred 'pardon') is itself an example of the interchanged life, of the bearing of burdens; "the injured bears the trouble of another's sin; he who is forgiven receives the freedom

54. Williams, Dove, p. 236.

55. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 173.

of another's love."⁵⁶ Pardon is a new possibility for relationship within the co-inherence given to man after the Fall. Pardon allows a relationship with God and a relationship with man in the fallen world. In fact the possibility of pardon is the possibility of life. Pardon is the deepest of all principles in the interchanged life.⁵⁷ It keeps the snapped and twisted web of the co-inherence from pulling apart completely and points the way to its restoration. If pardon is not a possibility "then the whole principle of interchange is false."⁵⁸

Williams stressed, as he stressed in dealing with sacrifice, the mutuality of pardon. Pardon is not technically something which we do, but a relationship which can exist. We can avail ourselves of this relationship or we can not. It is a mutual act in the restoration of co-inherence. Pardon is either mutual or it is not completely pardon. Therefore, just as there is little difference between bearing another's burden and letting another bear our burden there is, in the end, little difference between forgiving and being forgiven. In forgiving we are forgiven. Williams thought that the Lord's Prayer made this clear. Christ in that prayer proclaimed

57. Ibid., p. 108.

58. Ibid.

...that the active and passive modes of forgiveness were not to be separated; that they were indeed, in some sense, identical; one could not exist without the other.... to forgive and to be forgiven were one thing.⁵⁹

Pardon is a 'reidentification of love'⁶⁰ or the 'reconciliation and the knowledge of the injury in love.'⁶¹ Through pardon love is restored but it is not the forgiver who restores it but God. Forgiveness is an openness to the restoration of love - nothing more. As such it is, however, everything. Pardon is in the end, "only ours for fun; essentially we don't and can't."⁶²

We fail often to consider our superfluity to God and to neighbor and we fail to remember that pardon is 'only ours for fun.' Fallen man always shows a distinct tendency to mistake the acts of God and the things from God for his own. This tendency in Fallen man is a grave danger when he engages in pardon. On the one hand, being righteous himself he supposes, he wishes to grant conditional pardon: 'I shall pardon you this time if you shall promise never to do this again.' "This is a perversion", writes Williams, - "the reverse of the incarnation."⁶³ Conditional

59. Ibid., p. 157.

60. Williams, He Came Down, p. 60.

61. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 109.

62. Williams, Hell, p. 163.

63. Williams, He Came Down, p. 60.

pardon is only the prerogative of God, and from all indications he has not chosen to exercise it or make it a principle. If we suppose that the act of pardoning is ours alone we are apt to lose humility. Without humility there is no pardon. Only in humility can we realize the mutuality of pardon. Fallen man never achieves the proper humility; in the end we need to be pardoned for our very pardonings.⁶⁴

The co-inherence of creation and redemption points to another fact about forgiveness: "Sins (are) not to be forgotten; they (are) to be remembered."⁶⁵ Williams's objection to forgiveness in the prophets is that there it was or meant forgetting the sin.⁶⁶ Proper pardon demands that the sin be known and be known as an occasion of good - that is as pardoned. Christ meant by forgiveness "something at least by which the sin was to be brought into perfect accord with the original good."⁶⁷ Creation was to be a source of joy for man and therefore everything in it must partake of and lead to this joy. Forgiveness is thus for fun in another sense; it is at times fun and the joy is part of the fun. There is something divinely humorous in it. It "is the resolution of all into a kind of comedy, the happiness of reconciliation, the peace of love."⁶⁸

64. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 171.

65. Williams, Dove, p. 34.

66. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 141.

67. Ibid., p. 133.

68. Ibid., p. 118.

Williams's ideas about forgiveness can be seen in action in All Hallows' Eve. Lester in earlier days had mistreated Betty. Lester now wishes to be forgiven. The haste which is necessary for forgiveness is there; the recollection of the sin - without which there can be no reidentification of love; Lester becomes a victim of her victim; Betty becomes Lester's judge, but also the center and source of peace; the new joy of the sin recollected as pardoned is portrayed.⁶⁹

Man is left with a choice. He can choose not to be open to a reidentification of love. He can choose not to bear the burdens of others; he can choose not to substitute for others and let them substitute for him; he can choose to deny the co-inherence; he can choose to be unnatural and ungraceful. He can, in short, choose hell.

The Descent Into Hell

The descent into hell is, of course, not one of the works of love. It is included here because it helps to illumine what Williams meant by love by showing the reverse of love. The works of love and the descent into hell in many cases share a common imagery. Love is the affirmation of this imagery, hell is the negation of this imagery.

69. cf. Williams, Eve, pp. 118-120.

I first became interested in Williams because of the sense of the demonic which his novels convey. Several of the novels contain characters who have chosen hell and one novel, Descent Into Hell, intricately portrays the gradual descent of a man into hell. W. H. Auden says, "I know of no other writer, living or dead, who has given us so convincing and terrifying portraits of damned souls as Charles Williams."⁷⁰ What is so convincing and terrifying about these portraits is difficult to describe. Williams' conception and portrayal of hell ring true. The odor of hell is in the novels, but it is not possible in a short analysis to put one's finger exactly on the source of the stench.

Williams borrows much of his imagery of hell from Dante. I shall not point out what he borrows. For those who are familiar with Dante's imagery it will be obvious; for those who are not, it would be only of limited interest. I shall merely define sin and hell in general and show by reference to Descent Into Hell the nature of the descent.

Hell in Williams's system is a fixed state of sin. It is a state of sin become permanent. Sin is separation, hell is permanent separation. Sin, defined generally, is

70. Auden, op. cit., p. viii.

the unwillingness to co-inhere. It is living as if we were the pattern and end of the universe rather than living within and for the real pattern of the universe. Sin is the refusal to live for others and occasionally the refusal to let others live for us. Sin is often, however, not a simple unwillingness to co-inhere. It takes other subtle forms. It is sometimes overweeningly wishing to be the good itself - that is, God. The sinful desire of the devil, as defined by the Malleus Maleficarum, Williams tells us, is that "he desired to be, to those related to him by a certain dependence, the only source of good."⁷¹ We wish all to be dependent on us while we want to be dependent on no one. We desire to be above existence, to be free from being hurt by others. This desire and the attempt to satisfy it is nothing but sin; it is the desire to be "free from the co-inherence of all human souls, which it was the express intention of Christ to redeem."⁷²

Hell then is the achievement of this desire. The desire of the heart to become free, when it becomes a constant state of the heart, is hell. Hell is when we become to ourselves a self-contained unit of delight. "Hell is the place of those spirits who wish to have their

71. Williams, Witchcraft, p. 126.

72. Williams, Forgiveness, p. 149.

necessity in themselves."⁷³ And "the supreme achievement of hell is to make interchange impossible."⁷⁴ Hell is the absolute zero of co-inherence; motion ceases, everything becomes brittle and all life stops.

To change the terminology, original sin in Williams's system is our unfailing predisposition to live a life characterised only by I-It relationships. From these I-It relationships we can ascend to the I-Thou relations or descend to (a new category just invented) the I-(I) relationships. This last relationship is the self wishing to be in motion only with itself. It is a fictitious relationship, but a fatally fictitious relationship. It is of course no relationship at all which brings us back to the imagery of the absolute zero of co-inherence.

There are various ways of descending into hell. Self-sufficiency has many faces and many very pleasant faces. The first steps into hell are more often than not pleasant. Hell is both convincing and cosy until one arrives. Then it is repulsive and deadening. To personify for a moment, the devil can be the sweetest talker and the cleverest logician. He is especially versed in logic. He was the first logician. He is usually religious. Williams warns

73. Williams, Beatrice, p. 147.

74. Ibid., p. 138.

us particularly of the self-sufficiency which can be exercised in the acts which were meant to mend the co-inherence.

The Gospel bids us to deny ourselves? Yes. But even this denial can reek of self-sufficiency. Self-sacrifice can be as sinful as self-indulgence. Self-sacrifice can be a way of the soul, but so can something resembling self-indulgence. "We are not to deny to others the means of their love because those means may seem to indulge us."⁷⁵

The Gospel bids us to forgive? It does; but as I have already pointed out, Williams felt that forgiveness was a dangerous operation. We can forgive too much - forgive when forgiveness is not necessary. We can delight in forgiving but shrink from being forgiven. There has been within Protestantism a certain tendency to seek forgiveness only from God. This is fatal says Williams.⁷⁶ It is fatal simply because "a pride and self-respect which will be content to repose upon Messias is often unapt to repose on 'the brethren.'"⁷⁷ We feel we can only conduct this sort of business with God. God, however, much against our wishes has revealed that this sort of business is to be conducted with our neighbor. Often we prefer to remain

75. Williams, He Came Down, p. 82.

76. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 141.

77. Williams, He Came Down, p. 89.

miserable and unforgiven rather than to accept God's uncouth recommendation and turn to our brethren.⁷⁸

Prayer provides a new and fascinating means of sin. It offers us a means by which we can bully and coerce at a respectable distance. "The old self on the new way," says Williams, "has always enjoyed itself most at prayer."⁷⁹ There is another type of prayer which is a perfect expression of the relationships of hell. It is prayer by the self, to the self about or for the self. It is most frequently a thanksgiving. Williams describes it as "a ubiquitous trinity of devotion."⁸⁰

There are certain sins of the romantic way of life. They are usually sins of power. His first novel, Shadows of Ecstasy, and his last, All Hallows' Eve, deal with men of great power who have perverted the great romantic way of living and knowing. In the first, Nigel Considine has discovered the power of the romantic way. He has discovered the symbolic nature of creation. He has discovered the life which is born in the Beatrician moment - "who doesn't know that there is within the first moments of that divine delight some actuality of the conquest of death?"⁸¹ Considine wishes to capture this gift of love and make it a personal possession and an end in itself. His gospel is "the doctrine

78. Ibid., p. 78.

79. Ibid., p. 92.

80. Williams, Grab and Grace, in Religious Drama 3, p. 64.

81. Williams, Shadows, p. 81.

of transmutation of energy, of the conscious turning of joy and anguish alike into strength and will."⁸² The perversion is clearly seen when Considine explains more fully the logic of his gospel. "If you want more than sound it's a waste to spend power making sound, as it's a waste to spend on the beloved what's meant to discover more than the beloved."⁸³ This perversion of romanticism is, among other things, a denial of the Incarnation. Considine is killed after a long life of spectacular transmutations of energy by a disciple who succumbs to simple greed. No matter how sophisticated sin becomes, it usually succumbs or reverts to the simple and obvious sins in the end. All things at sometime or other return to their center.

Nigel Considine wanted to use God for his own purposes; Simon the clerk, in All Hallows' Eve, wanted to displace him. He had lost the good of the intellect. He was not able to discern either the heavenly or the earthly patterns of life. The losing of life was to him merely the losing of life. Weakness was weakness, power was power. He wished to be the source of all derivations. He lived a life more ascetic than any saint. There was only one thing he would not do : give without intending to control. He

82. Ibid., p. 208.

83. Ibid., p. 90.

refused the little deaths of the self in the exchanges of mankind and he refused death itself.

He would not go to it, as that other child of a Jewish girl had done. That other had refused safeguard and miracle; he had refused the achievement of security. He had gone into death - and the Clerk supposed it his failure - as the rest of mankind go - ignorant and in pain.⁸⁴

Simon denied everything but himself and that is what he was left with. He was finally killed by his own magic.

There is no more excellent and horrifying portrayal of the gradual descent of the soul into hell than that of Lawrence Wentworth in Descent Into Hell. The story is refreshingly free of magicians and supermen. Wentworth is an ordinary man. He does not take hell by storm but slips in quietly. Wentworth's descent is made more obviously repulsive because it is described against the story of the ascent into heaven of Pauline Anstruther. The contrast between Pauline's ascent and Wentworth's descent increases until it ends with Pauline at one with the heavenly pattern of substitution and Wentworth thudding ungracefully into the bottom of hell.

Wentworth's descent starts almost in innocence. He is attracted to Adela Hunt. Wentworth indulges himself in the fancy that a woman much younger than he is attracted

84. Williams, Eve, p. 109.

to him. It is not an unusual indulgence. But this indulgence leads to a further; he fancies that since he desires her no one else must have her.

Wentworth's descent occurs in his mind. He has fallen into inaccuracy from the very beginning. He imagines his love affair. It has no basis in reality. In any real love affair Wentworth's present state could be reached, but the start would be more realistic. Wentworth has already descended "to the indulgence of (his) own private appetites, no longer touched by a mutuality of love."⁸⁵ He is slowly sinking into himself.

Adela and her real lover, Hugh Prescott, miss one of Wentworth's meetings. They lie to him so that it will not appear that they are together. Wentworth is an intelligent man. He suspects that they are together. He grows envious. He cannot give himself to the one other person who has come to his gathering. Suspicion and envy gnaw at his mind. He begins to despise the one who came. She leaves. Wentworth decides to spy at the railway station to see if his suspicions are correct. He rationalizes. He is a grown man. Should a grown man spy? No, of course not. "He would not go to spy; he would go for a walk. He went out of the room, down the soft stairs of his mind,

85. Williams, Beatrice, p. 142.

into the streets of his mind, to find the phantoms of his mind. He desired Hell."⁸⁶

The unreality of his original indulgence caused him to sink deeper into himself. To sink deeper into one's self is to become more and more separated from others. His separation is now resentment. He now resents any love that is not his. It is the natural progression: "There arises...after the fall indulgence of our own 'lussuria', a resentment towards any 'lussuria' which others enjoy."⁸⁷

Wentworth's inaccuracy becomes greater. What was fancy about a real woman becomes fancy about an unreal woman. We follow Wentworth seeking peace within himself. We wander through his mind. He is seduced by a diabolic organism down the stairs of his mind. She leads him to a land where he is the absolute source of life. Everything there is absolutely dependent on his whim. Williams's imagery is very well done:

The whole air of this place was his breath; if he took a very deep breath, there would be no air left, outside himself. He could stand in a vacuum, and nothing outside himself could breathe at all, until he chose to breathe again; ⁸⁸

The diabolic organism recites the gospel of hell to him: "It's good for man to be alone."⁸⁹ And he sinks further:

86. Williams, Hell, p. 50.

87. Williams, Beatrice, pp. 120-121.

88. Williams, Hell, p. 86.

89. Ibid., p. 86.

"He sank into oblivion; he died to things other than himself; he woke to himself."⁹⁰ He reverses the heavenly pattern of sacrifice.

The diabolic organism is a replica of Adela Hunt. Wentworth had created it. It was succubus; 'the feminine offspring of his masculinity', a projection of his own ego. It was a rather nice succubus, as they usually are. It was

neither dead nor living. It was the creature which had lingered outside the illusion of Eden for the man who consented to its company. It had neither intellect nor imagination; it could not criticize or create, for the life of its substance was only the magical apparition of its father's desires.⁹¹

It was

Image without incarnation, it was the delight of his incarnation for it was without any of the things that troubled him in the incarnation of the beloved. He could exercise upon it all arts but one; he could not ever discover by it or practise towards it the freedom of love. A man cannot love himself; he can only idolize it, and over the idol delightfully tyrannize - without purpose. The great gift which the simple idolatry of self gives is lack of purpose;⁹²

Williams now introduces the imagery of marriage and sexual intercourse to reveal Wentworth's further descent. Wentworth consummates the marriage, and therefore his

90. Ibid., p. 87.

91. Ibid., p. 126.

92. Ibid., p. 127.

damnation. Wentworth, we are told, "had no need of the devices against fertility which, wisely or unwisely, the terrible dilemmas of men drive them to use, for he consummated a marriage whose infertility was assured."⁹³

The image is horrible and repulsive, but it takes on a depth of meaning when we recall that marriage and childbirth were for Williams the greatest and deepest natural images of co-inherence, exchange and substitution. Here then we have the perfect image of the utter perversity, the utter infertility, the utter incoherence of hell. Wentworth begets himself on himself. It is complete spiritual incest. One of the most creative acts of existence is here perverted to complete sterility. It is the horrible image of complete self love. It is complete giving of oneself to oneself and the absolute infertility of such a giving. It is the image of the consummation of the I-(I) relationship. Wentworth is beyond salvation - because in his world there is no god except he and no inhabitants except he.

Williams called this state of existence (if it can be called that) Gomorrah. It is the last level of hell before the absolute zero of Dis (to use Dante's term). Williams's description of this state, though long, should be given.

We know all about Sodom nowadays, but perhaps we know the other even better. Men can be in love

93. Ibid., p. 130.

with men, women with women, and still be in love and make sounds and speeches, but don't you know how quiet the streets of Gomorrah are? haven't you seen the pools that everlastingly reflect the faces of those who walk with their own phantasms, but the phantasms aren't reflected, and can't be. The lovers of Gomorrah are quite contented, Periel; They aren't bothered by alteration,....They're monogamous enough! and they've no children - no cherubim breaking into being or babies as tiresome as ours; there's no birth there, and only the second death. There's no distinction between lover and beloved; they beget themselves on their adoration of themselves, and they live and feed and starve on themselves, and by themselves too, for creation, as my predecessor said, is the mercy of God, and they won't have the facts of creation.⁹⁴

In the last chapter, "Beyond Gomorrah", Wentworth cannot even hate properly. Hate requires the acknowledgement that another exists. Wentworth was beyond this. He is in a complete stupor. His physical motions are slowly stopping; his spiritual and mental motions have already ceased. Even the reflecting pools of Gomorrah are disturbed and shattered. The self completely disintegrates. Nothingness overwhelms him and what is left of him splashes pathetically into the pool of nothingness. Wentworth has arrived. He finds not peace but emptiness. He has been deceived, It is too late. He does not care.

94. Ibid., p. 174.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The title of this essay is apt to mislead. Charles Williams was not a theologian. A better title would perhaps have been 'The Theologizing of Charles Williams.' That title seemed too patronizing and 'The Theological Thought of Charles Williams' sounded too lofty and seemed to hold the promise of subtleties which are not there. Thus, the title, 'The Theology of Charles Williams.'

Williams was not a systematic thinker, nor a systematic theologian. He was interested only in a limited number of doctrines. He showed remarkably little interest in the last paragraph of the creed. He dealt mostly with the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. Even in these doctrines he has not considered all the problems nor all the traditional materials. His insights and therefore his themes are limited. He was particularly interested in the doctrine of the Trinity, but only in certain dimensions of this doctrine. His conception of the Trinity is, for example, on the whole a monolithic blur. He does not

trouble to distinguish the Father from the Son and the Spirit from both. Nor did he go into the development of the doctrine historically. He assumed, it seems, that 'person' means now what it meant when Tertullian applied it to the Trinity. He was not interested in the historical Jesus but in the principles he embodied (Incarnation) and what became of these principles (Crucifixion). Thought about the resurrection of Christ is missing almost entirely, although it is certainly assumed in his system. The resurrection was the divine proof of the principles of the Incarnation and crucifixion.

Then there is a certain naivete in some of his theological thought. Can we give over our burdens to someone else as he thought? Although the principle involved might be the same as that of handing over a bag, is the procedure quite the same, and is it quite so easy as he thought? Naivete is, however, sometimes a judgement on him who proclaims it. For instance there is something wonderfully naive in the proclamation, 'He is risen.' Williams, no doubt would have pointed out that we are commanded to give over our burdens to others and that whether it seems impractical or even impossible or not is not the real issue.

His fundamental method of theologizing is not beyond criticism. 'Not what Christ said and did but what he was' is a good maxim for the theologian if he agrees finally

that Christ did and said what he was. Christ for Williams is too often a walking syllogism of salvation, a two legged argument for a special way of life. What Christ said and did does not, of course, go wholly unnoticed. There is a certain soundness to Williams's method of correlating the events in Christ's life with the events in our lives, which overcomes in part its mechanical simplicity. This soundness comes from the evidence that Christ might have understood his life as symbolic: at least perhaps as prophetically symbolic.

Williams certainly could have dealt with doctrines systematically if he had wished to do so. His abilities were poetic and consequently his theology was poetic. The poetic mind is typically highly imaginative and highly integrative. The poet is not only able to see particulars with intense vividness, but he is able to reconcile disparate elements of experience into organic wholeness.¹ We see in Williams's theology both the imaginative and the integrative powers at work: the operations of childbirth and the divine life of the Trinity sharing a common nature, for instance. Williams saw the symbols. If they live for us then they live for us. If Williams's image of childbirth lives for us then it communicates something of the nature of the Trinity to us and at the same time it makes childbirth a deeper reality. If it does not then it does not. It

1. Amos Wilder, New Testament Faith for Today, SCM Press Ltd., p. 55.

would be foolish to criticize the symbols simply because they do not live for us. Criticism is only warranted when the symbols seem to us demonic, or faulty, or capable of grave misunderstanding. Williams's theology then is roughly poetic. The poet sees what images he sees. That Williams did not deal with the whole of theology then must remain simply an observation.

The poetic-theologian can be criticized however when he derives theological concepts from the very fact of his integrative powers. Williams frequently felt that his unconventional apologetic should be persuasive to the most natural of natural men. His concern he said was mostly with the unconvenated graces. He wished to show how practical and natural the high doctrines of Christendom really were. He will not, I think, convince the natural man. He simply seems to have forgotten that he learned theology before he learned about childbirth and romantic love. There is more to be said about his naturalization of theology. I shall take it up later.

Williams thought is noticeably Platonic. His novel, The Place of the Lion, is remarkably platonic. It does not, however, prove that he was a thoroughgoing Platonist as Many Dimensions does not prove that he believed in the magical powers of a certain stone from Solomon's crown. There is certainly platonizing in his theology. The simple

directional signs in his theology reveal it. Things go up and things come down. His conception of creation as symbolic points to it. His account of the Fall seems to stress the loss of the good of the intellect. 'Knowing as God's' he said was secondary. Man's fall was wishing to know the good as evil. It is almost a Platonic fall. His anthropology is obviously worked out in Platonic concepts: we are lesser images of the One original, Christ. His concept of love seems to have within it that certain 'upward tendency.' As I said, he conceives of creation as something like the moving image of the Trinity, although this caricature does not quite capture his conception since his point was that the Trinity was moving too. Salvation, he thought, was a union with God, as many neo-Platonists had thought before him. Revelation for him meant, more often than not, revelation of ideas and principles and states of being.

Williams read the great Doctors of the church but he also read and admired an offbeat group of English mystics who owed at least as much to Plotinus as they did to Christ, or Paul. The Lady Julian of Norwich was a favorite of his; the date of her visions or shewings are included in the chronological table of his history, appropriately between the Black Death and the Great Schism of the West. He was familiar with the Cloud of Unknowing, a 14th century work

in which it is revealed how the mystical love of God breaks through the cloud of unknowing to our hearts. And finally the other two he most frequently mentions are William Law and John of the Cross.

His conception of forgiveness and his emphasis on unitive love owe much to this English mystical tradition. Williams however was not a mystic as these other writers were mystics. If he was a mystic at all he was a mystic of the Way of Affirmation and therefore a most unusual mystic. The mystics have been criticized most for the individualism of their symbolism. It is not a criticism which can be made of Williams's symbolism. No man ever saw the communal nature of existence imaged in so many ways and in such diverse phenomena as he. The centrality of the Incarnation in his thought never let him aspire to mystical feats of levitation or cloudy mystical visions. He had visions but at their center was always something grossly unspiritual like a peice of dirt, a pregnant woman or a sack being carried.

Williams' thought is noticeably Platonic, but is it more noticeably Platonic than a large part of English thought over the centuries? His thought, I think, resembles traditional manifestations of the English spirit. The same spirit which moved in the Cambridge Platonists, the Metaphysical Poets, the Gothic novelists and English

Romanticism moved in him. All these groups and movements seem to share certain characteristics. Perhaps the most basic characteristic is the realization of a numinous quality in nature, or of power in nature. For some the power was demonic, for others heavenly, but for most it was a mixture. Blake saw tigers, Mary Shelley, monsters, Tennyson, 'nature red in tooth and claw' and Charles Williams, the terrible good. This tradition might almost be thought of as a manifestation of a secular liturgical sense. In some obscure way British horror stories and the liturgical sense seem to be related. Far from fading out of English thought, this tradition is coming back in strongly, especially in literature. A new kind of Gothic novel seems to be making a comeback; William Golding's Lord of the Flies is perhaps representative of the return to the Gothic.

Symbolism was a concern of this whole tradition. For all the groups I have mentioned reality is somehow symbolic. The point is that William's thought is only accidentally Platonic; it is essentially English.

This tradition of English thought manifests itself theologically in sacramental or Incarnational theology. Williams's theology is above all else a sacramental theology. He perhaps deserves the title of the poet of sacramental theology for this century. His thought is Platonic precisely because it is in the tradition of sacramental theology and

not the other way around. Consequently we find the same problems in Williams's theology that have always been in sacramental theology. Williams was never able to adequately distinguish the church from the world and he was never able to make much sense out of historical existence.

The church in Williams's theology is that which is led by the Spirit to regenerate mankind. It is the most co-inherent reality; it is the society which lives most fully by substitution and exchange. Or rather it should be. Its function is to witness by its life to life. It is to witness to the heavenly pattern, that is it is to live by the heavenly pattern. The church is "to effect the mystery of unity."² It is to do all that yet that is what all men are to do simply out of good sense. Williams seems to have had no conception of the church as something organically different than society. It is a supernatural society but that means only that its powers are greater. The church is not, he felt, so different from nature. And often the church had lost sight of its supernatural vocation. The church is, or should be, simply those who live life more abundantly.

Williams could make little sense out of the church's existence in time. The church was to convert time, but

2. Williams, Dove, p. 115.

to what? Answer: to the heavenly pattern of existence. It is significant that the one pattern he does not derive from the Incarnation is the pattern of the Word coming into history and living historically. Certainly it is assumed that the Word has in fact done this but he never insists on it as a paradigm for our existence. History for him is time going on, time in which we move to the center which is love. His history, The Descent of the Dove is full of good insights into trends and movements within history but again it is his integrative powers and not any 'theology' of history which produce them. He could grasp the common spirit of diverse phenomena. His summary comparisons of Luther, Calvin and Loyola are precise and perceptive. In his tracing of the motion and direction of the Spirit through history he managed to see and say the right things well. "St. Augustine's predestination", he wrote, "was safe with him, comprehensible in Calvin, tiresome in the English Puritans, and quite horrible in the Scottish presbyterians."³ Or about the Reformation: "Contrition indeed was renewed - but not for its own day, only for the day before yesterday."⁴

His history tends to be narrated in an impersonal and schematic way. There is a movement here, there is its

3. Ibid., p. 191.

4. Ibid., p. 177.

compensation there. The Montanist movement for example is treated as an entirely natural contrary opinion to orthodoxy. He does not point to any specific historical situation which might have brought the Montanist movement about or into power. World history for him is almost a philosopher engaged in logical dialectics.

Nevertheless Williams never recommended or tolerated any escape from history. His mysticism (if that is what it is) is always in the Way of Affirmation and therefore it is not to be followed out of or above history but within history. We are the images to be affirmed. When we affirm our neighbor's existence properly (by becoming one through substitution) we in fact affirm God. About the decline of the Roman Empire Rostovtzeff had written, "Any creative power that remained turned away from this world and its demands and studied how to know God and be united with him."⁵ Williams objected:

But that is hardly so; it had been decided otherwise when the Gnostics were defeated and when time was found to be a necessary condition of the Christian life. The new heresy of Manichaeism which was intruding from the East might indeed exclude matter and the world from its consideration. But the orthodox faith, based on the union of very matter and very deity, could not do so. Its survival, its success, had partly been due to its interlocked charity, its habits of exchange of all wealth, its intense knowledge of the community....To know God it was necessary to love the brethren - first, as it

5. Quoted by Williams, Ibid., p. 45.

were, from predilection and choice, but afterwards from him and through him. ⁶

Williams had trouble distinguishing the world from the church because of his use of the symbolism of Platonism. Christ came as man; therefore he was related to all men. Williams established the relationship by means of the Platonic doctrine of 'real universals'. Christ became man and therefore "he united with the Godhead something in which each man participates, and the very act of Incarnation is itself the deification of the whole human race and of every man and woman belonging to it."⁷ The whole race then is somehow mystically and organically of the body of Christ. We are all sons by nature. But the New Testament does not conceive of our sonship as natural. We are rather, according to the New Testament, sons by adoption and grace. Williams seems to have never seen the problems of his Platonic symbolism, and in fact tended to make virtues of them.

As I have tried to show upon occasions, Williams and William Temple concur on some basic theological points. There is a remarkable resemblance between many of Williams's basic theological positions and Temple's Christocentric metaphysics in Christus Veritas. The resemblances are

6. Ibid.

7. Temple, Christus Veritas, p. 132.

most easily explained by assuming that Williams read Temple. They were, after all, contemporaries. Yet the problem with this explanation is that Williams, as far as I have been able to determine, never quoted Temple or mentioned any indebtedness to him. I find it difficult to think that Williams did not read Temple, yet I find it equally difficult to think that Williams read him, took over some theological insights and did not acknowledge his indebtedness. The relation between Williams's thought and Temple's is worth looking into in greater detail.

For all its romanticism, there are some strangely modern streaks in Williams thought. His conception of sin and hell are both profoundly in keeping with the latest thought. The modern concepts of hell as alienation, estrangement, separation are all present in his understanding of it. Hell is the complete absence of co-inherence, or relationship. That is precisely what J.-P. Sartre is saying in No Exit. In this play we are presented with a group of people who can in no way fit together. They are unable to co-inhere. All they are able to do is stare at one another with the Sartrian stare which is the negation of another's being. Williams, I think, has revealed the nature of hell better than Sartre. I will even suggest that Descent Into Hell is the best portrayal of the means to hell and the nature of hell in modern literature. And

it should be remembered that his conception of hell was not a string of literary insights but that it was grounded precisely within his theological framework and worked out systematically from it.

There is even, I think, a common spirit in the thought of Bonhoeffer and the thought of Williams, although it would be foolish to suggest that Williams was an English Bonhoeffer. Williams, like Bonhoeffer, was concerned with putting Christianity back into the center of life, rooting out the sentimentalism, making humility rather than weakness a virtue, showing the cost of discipleship, and the necessity for obedience and sacrifice. Williams saw that the good was hard and that the pious have always attempted to make it too nice or too easy - too cheap. He saw that the holiness of God was his eternal state of self-giving, and that the holiness of man was to participate in this self-giving. Like Bonhoeffer he saw that "Man is challenged to participate in the suffering of God at the hands of a godless world."⁸ He suggested that it was time for the church to work out what it meant that Christ was a man. After all the world had been doing this for some time. The chapter in his history on the modern period is appropriately entitled "The Return to

8. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Prisoner for God, Macmillan, 1959, p. 166.

the Manhood." And finally his criticism of the institutional church and his concern with the Way of Affirmation relate his thought to Bonhoeffer's.

Williams's greatest theological contribution was in working out the implications of his vision of the ground of being as communal. In a modest way he worked out a Trinitarian metaphysics. The Persons of the Trinity are three yet one: they co-inhere. They are so related that they are in one another. The Trinity is always giving of and to itself; it is engaged in the rich relationship of life. The Trinity is somehow a divine 'koinonia'. Christ reveals the Trinity as 'koinonia' and he reveals what makes the Trinity 'koinonia': substitution. It is simply living for and through the other - never for oneself. It is so living for and through the other that a union is established. Only in the establishment of this unity is life lived. Redemption occurs in this 'koinonia' and the 'koinonia' is somehow the foretaste of salvation. Even life in the kingdom will be vicarious - completely vicarious.

Williams used the city as the natural image of this 'koinonia'. The city, with its interrelated functions, its cohesiveness, its heightened interaction, its unity in diversity, its complex systems of exchange and derivation, provided him with an image of the nature of the kingdom. The Holy Ghost was for him the builder of cities. "The

city is the state which the church is to become."⁹

The Holy Ghost, it is declared, drives us towards a union with that Union. What He created, we must choose - accepting in the Re-creation the original creation. That Re-creation was presented to us, in the Apocalypse, under the image of a City. It is precisely the nations, and the races, who are to enter into it. The feast of Christ the King is also the feast of Christ the city. The principle of that city, and the gates of it, are the nature of Christ as the Holy Ghost exhibits it and inducts us into it; it is the doctrine that no man lives to himself or indeed from himself. This is the doctrine common to nature and grace. ¹⁰

The spirit leads us to associations, then to communion and finally to union. Only in association and communion and union is life nourished and fulfilled.

Williams's nausea over existence is explained by nothing else than the intensity of his vision of the City - of the communal nature of life. All relationships contain within them a demonic element of hostility. This demonic element is a result of sin in the city. It is there and it will be there until the coming of the kingdom. The communal nature of existence seems to intensify the outrage of sin. If our sins only affected ourselves then we should all perhaps be lonely imbeciles. But our sin affects the City. Our outrages outrage it. Williams understood the outrages of the city and the demonic element in all relationships

9. Williams, Dove, p. 15.

10. Williams, The Image of the City, p. 104.

so deeply because he perceived the nature and centrality of community.

Williams's unusual essay "What the Cross Means to Me" presents both poles of his thought about existence in sharp contrast. It begins with the assertion that this creation needs justifying.¹¹ We are, on earth, in distress. God sustains us in our distress. He imposes his law (being) on us. The distress of our existence is prolonged and vehement and torturous. Then the first approach to Justice appears: God (in the Person of Christ) deigns to endure the justice he decreed. It is not however at first sight an encouraging justice. He was not put to death by evil men, but by men intending more than anything else only the good. "They crucified Him; let it be said, they did well." In life a kind of death attends us everywhere. Life is good but somehow unendurable. Even Christ shrank from its horrors: 'O not this! If it is possible, not this.' Christ was subjected to the obscenity and horror of life. Yet God sustained creation. God had grown the wood of the cross and the thorns. "The Cross therefore is the express image of his will; it depends in its visible shape and strength wholly on Him." Then life goes to the Cross. "Life has known absolutely all its own contradictions. He survives;

11. The essay which I am summarizing is in Williams, Selected Writings, pp. 94-105.

He perfectly survives." By his substitution he renewed our proper nature. "The Church (of which He seems to have had a low opinion) is His choice, but nature was His original choice, and He has a supreme fidelity." By his sacrifice we are compelled to concede to Him the propriety of our creation. And finally "Not the least gift of the Gospel is that our experiences of good need not be separated from our experiences of evil, need not and must not be. "

In this unusual and obscure essay he combines the extremes of his insights. Creation needs justifying in its obscenity - even the evil which we experience is to be known as occasions of good. To see both sides as vividly as he, is the poet's advantage, (if indeed it is an advantage). While he saw both sides sharply, it is the message of salvation which he embraced. Christ came and suffered the contradictions of existence and died for mankind, and then? Then he justified the ground of being as communal and the life which is to be lived as a result.

His basic image of the essence of the 'koinonia' was co-inherence. Whether it is a word or not does not matter. The necessity of the word lies in Trinitarian theology itself. Coherence is not an adequate expression of the relation of the Three Persons since it does not adequately express their unity. Inherence on the other hand does not adequately express their separate identity. Co-inherence

is necessary. Yet it must be asked how adequately co-inherence expresses the essence of community. It is clearly not a biblical word as I pointed out earlier. We are not told to co-inhere one with another, nor is it ever revealed that the Persons of the Trinity co-inhere. Yet it is equally clear that co-inherence is in a way a biblical concept. It is expressed first in the myth of the common ancestor. Then in the covenants. The covenant with Abraham has something of the concept of co-inherence in it. The blessing and destiny of a mighty nation are on and in him. He is, for a while at least, the chosen people of God. Those many generations after him are blessed in him. So too in the covenant with Moses. Throughout the history of Israel we find moments in which the nation seems to reside in one member of the nation. This member is himself and at the same time Israel. Sacral kingship was the institutionalization of this concept. The king was Israel before Yahweh. He was responsible for her iniquities and for her righteousness and peace. The prophets were to God what the people were really to God. In the iniquity of the people the prophets suffered. Yet they were always distinct from the people in that they had to proclaim the word against the iniquities. Co-inherence is seen at its deepest level in the servant imagery. Here somehow in one or several or many the whole is represented. Certainly in the New

Testament we find the concept of co-inherence. At least some traditions in the New Testament interpret Christ as a type of Israel, somehow including in himself the old Israel and its destiny. Co-inherence more on the order of Williams's definition is obvious in the Gospel of John and the Pauline Epistles.

The concept of co-inherence is found in the Bible, but it is not found alone. Perhaps the greatest criticism of Williams's understanding of community in terms of co-inherence is that it tends to be impersonal and mechanical. His use of substitution and bearing burdens tends to overcome the impersonality of the imagery of co-inherence, but the impersonality remains. Even the imagery of substitution is perhaps too impersonal to convey the self-giving of the operations of love. His use of natural imagery and organic metaphors attest to this same impersonality. This too was softened by his use of the imagery of romantic love.

While his imagery of the communal nature of reality tends to be impersonal at least it is there; at least he does have a profoundly communal view of life. Malcolm Ross in his essay "The Writer As Christian" suggests that the recovery of the corporate sense is the immediate challenge to Christian symbolism.¹² He thinks that even in Eliot

12. Malcolm Ross, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

the corporate sense, the sense of living community is absent.¹³ "Without a recovery of this corporate sense," he writes, "I suspect that Christian art can advance no further because it will have failed to cure the disease of alienation."¹⁴ Williams for one concentrated his energies on the recovery of the corporate sense and of genuine community. It is this vision in his writings which justifies more than anything else any interest in them. Judging from the remarks of his friends he seems to have realized this vision for himself. All his work was in one way or another an apologetic for the restoration of community based on the divine pattern and a challenge to live the only life which can create this community: the life of sacrificial love.

And you - are you sure that man can conquer till he has been wholly defeated? Are you sure that he can find plenitude till he has known utter despair? You will not let him despair of himself, but it may be that only in such a complete despair he finds that which cannot despair and is something other than man.¹⁵

13. Ibid., p. 30.

14. Ibid.

15. Williams, Shadows of Ecstasy, p. 210.

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